UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Reproducing Literary Subjectivities

Victorian Life-Writing and Public Opinion

by

By Janice Schroeder

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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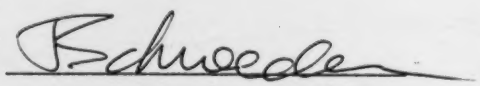

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ABSTRACT

Two examples of Victorian life-writing--Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) and John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* (1873)--are examined for the ways in which they institute the sexual and literary reputations of their subjects. In addition, the role of public opinion in shaping these reputations is identified through readings of reviews of these texts found in the Victorian periodical press. Chapter One argues that the history of the reproduction of public opinion helps us to understand how notions of "sameness" and "homogeneity" were formulated in the Victorian period as the constructed backdrop to the apparently "organic" genius. Chapter Two considers Gaskell's historicization of Brontë's physical and mental pain relative to her life in Yorkshire and turns to a discussion of reviewers' reactions to Gaskell as a biographer/historian. Mill's narrative of mental progress and development in his *Autobiography* is examined in Chapter Three alongside nineteenth-century transformations to public education.

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ONE

Victorian Self-Representation and Public Opinion

In *Making a Social Body*, Mary Poovey theorizes the cultural and political formation of the *appearance* of a "mass," undifferentiated social body in mid-Victorian society. She writes that recent scholarship which concentrates on difference and fragmentation tends to overlook the other history, that is, the history of the production of sameness and homogeneity through technologies such as the census and statistics. Scholarship which uncovers the history of difference in identities (or disaggregation, in Poovey's work) tends not to investigate "the assumptions and conventions that constitute the epistemological field that underwrites the salience acquired by identity categories at various times" (2). The history of the (re)production of public opinion is one such opportunity to explore the assumptions and conventions that formulate notions of "sameness" and "homogeneity" more specifically. Public opinion operates as the constructed backdrop in the Victorian period to the apparently "organic" genius. My project looks at two examples of Victorian life-writing--Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) and John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* (1873)--to understand how Victorian notions of difference and individuality in Victorian biography were contrasted with public opinion which circulated in the periodical press. Through the reviewing practices and mass circulation of periodical literature, a formation called public opinion could be organized, criticized, and rearticulated. In what follows, I historicize the production of shared (albeit conflicted) knowledges about public figures whose popular recognition depends on the assumption that multiple readers are familiar

with specific facts and speculations, however few (as in the case of Charlotte Brontë), and share a mutual acceptance or disapproval of the public reputation of certain figures of interest.

The essays here are organized around two broad questions: how does Victorian literary biography institute the sexual and literary reputations of its subjects and what role does public opinion play in the creation of the literary biography and, by extension, the literary genius him or herself? In order to examine popular opinion surrounding two significant literary figures of the Victorian period, I take up the first major pieces of life-writing about them, and then turn to the reviews of these texts in the periodical press. In this chapter, I sketch out some of the literary-critical and theoretical underpinnings of my observations and arguments in the ensuing chapters. I focus on the tension in literary/historical criticism between literature and history as coextensive and mutually informative forms of knowledge, then turn to a discussion of the ways in which subjectivity can be historicized to produce knowledge of the subject as a cultural and social construct. Finally, I contextualize the practice of Victorian life-writing by mapping out the relatedness of its generic boundaries to issues of authorship, gender and class.

Although these essays concentrate on the cultural effects of biography and on the dominant ideologies one sees at work in these texts, I offer suggestions for ways of reading these texts that augment my historicization of the effects of genre on a reading audience. It is important to stress that my readings of the texts under observation are not the same ones a Victorian reader would likely have adopted. Rather, I try to

describe the structures, patterns, and aporia of the texts which made them seem truthful and real to a Victorian audience. In doing so, I follow Rosemary Hennessy's suggestions for reading historically and materially while using the tools of deconstructive analysis to decode the underlying tensions and anxieties of a text.[1]

I

The cultural usage of popular "public opinion" as an ideological mechanism for social control has a history which needs to be studied for its ways of managing and making sense out of such things as genius and deviance. However, one of my foundational assumptions is that public opinion is not a fixed, stable entity; the notion that public opinion explains reaction to cultural phenomena or that the public can simply be appealed to for its (singular) opinion fails to recognize that public opinion is itself a constructed and historically situated text which produces its own specific effects. Nevertheless, the production of the appearance of sameness and agreement which a term like "public opinion" enables allows me to generalize about the reaction to specific Victorian biographies and to isolate the tensions and contradictions that biographies reproduced among a reading public with particular sets of expectations. In doing so, I argue that the creation of public opinion itself (about, in this case, the Victorian literary genius) is always specific to the historical, material conditions of cultural production. That is, the creation and representation of public opinion in the Victorian period is specific to certain dominant ways of producing cultural artifacts such as the biography, the novel, the periodical. The practice of anonymous reviewing, the rise of the professionalized writer and critic, (including both men and women), and

changes to legislation concerning marital, property, and educational issues are all important, material factors that are specific to the Victorian period and that affect the creation, dissemination, and use of popular, public opinion.

Victorian theories of the effects of public opinion pit the individual and the social against each other in a hostile coexistence. John Stuart Mill's 1859 essay *On Liberty*, written in collaboration with his wife, Harriet Taylor, theorizes that the imperative of sameness and conformity that mass opinion produces is detrimental to the survival and expression of the individual character. Mill's essay "Of Individuality" distinguishes between what was conceived of as "natural" and "constructed" in the human character, placing the individual subject's desires within the realm of the natural, and "the masses" within the constructed and the manufactured. "A person whose desires and impulses are his own--are the expressions of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture--is said to have a character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own has no character, no more than a steam engine has a character" (57). Mill's evocation of the steam engine equates the masses, and the "mass-produced individual" with the mechanical and the uniform which industrial progress produces. By contrast, the "human nature" of the individual genius--whom Mill represents as more human than the individual of "unoriginal mind"--is an organic and dynamic force in society, whose individuality, Mill suggests, must not be crushed by the mechanized sameness of mass opinion, but allowed to flourish in the rich soil of individual growth and development. "Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which

requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing" (56-57). Mill was undoubtedly reacting here to criticism which had been levelled at his work and his private life; a "prodigy" himself, Mill's perspective on literary genius is inappropriate as a "reliable" example of a typical Victorian attitude. Yet his essay serves to signal the distinction Victorians drew between an undifferentiated "mass opinion" and the individual expression of the genius.[2] Mill reasons that if freedom of opinion were seen as the ultimate end of a progressive society, there would be no danger of encroaching upon the liberties of the individual. But the mass public, as Mill represents it, cannot see the value of a plurality of opinion, but rather insists on a homogeneity of action and opinion as the guarantee of social harmony. Originality of thought and action is the province of the organic genius, of which society can sustain and tolerate only a very few. The mass public and its "opinion"--based on a "blind and simply mechanical adhesion to [custom]"--serves in Mill's rhetoric as the background to the innovation of the genius who has the power and courage to resist dominant modes of thought (124).

Public opinion could be represented as a controlling and ultimately repressive check on the individual, as it was in *On Liberty* or it could serve as the arbiter of morality, good taste, and common sense. Reviewers and essayists who wrote for a mass audience in the periodical press could appeal to "public opinion" in order to galvanize a notion of general consent or dissatisfaction among a "disparate group of possible readers" (Klancher 77). In any case, the "real" opinion held by "the public" is of course always illusory; I read public opinion as a shorthand for ideology. The term

usually tells us as much about the writer who invokes the term as it does about the public towards which he or she gestures. In these essays, I do not read Victorian periodical reviews as transparent indicators of public opinion, but as forms of cultural work which gave voice to social anxieties created by contradictions between competing sets of Victorian ideologies. This way of reading finds its roots in the Althusserian tradition, in which history is invoked to explain those particular forms and significations of a text which suggest the real. Articulated in another way, Rosemary Hennessy suggests one read "symptomatically."

> To read a text symptomatically is to make visible that which hegemonic ideology does not mention, those things which must not be spoken, discursive contestations which are naturalized in the interdiscourse but which still shape the text's diseased relation to itself. To read symptomatically is to reveal this historicity in the texts of culture and in so doing put on display the exploitative social arrangements that they so often manage (94).

Symptomatic reading focuses on the contradictions a text's narrative tries to resolve. As such, symptomatic reading is a form of ideology critique which points out the "unsaid" of a text and the "self-contradictory moments in a text's logic" (92).[3]

In the Althusserian formulation, ideology is both representational and material, a set of beliefs or ideas on the one hand, and a series of concrete, everyday practices on the other. Althusser's central thesis in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" is that "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 87). Individuals have an ideological relationship to texts in that they recognize, through language, the "truth" of a text, its apparent stability, coherence, and timelessness. When readers identify with particular texts,

when they "see" themselves and their opinions represented in language, an ideological form of consent is created, based on what Althusser refers to as "common sense." This does not imply, however, that ideologies are simply a form of "false consciousness" or a "necessary lie" under which the population blindly operates. Rather, writes Terry Eagleton, "successful ideologies must be more than imposed illusions, and for all their inconsistencies must communicate to their subjects a version of social reality which is real and recognizable enough not to be simply rejected out of hand" (15). Ideological conflict occurs when individuals' imagined relationship to their real condition of existence no longer "makes sense." Non-sense arises out of the contradictions within ideology's veiled instability and artificiality.

Althusser's second thesis on ideology suggests that ideology's material existence arises out of the concrete practices of institutions in which and through which individuals act. "The individual behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which 'depend' the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject" (Althusser 91). One cannot understand the operations of specific ideologies without attaining some notion of the ways in which those ideologies operate within the institutions which give rise to them. In the case of my project, the ideological work of life-writing and periodical reviewing is contextualized and historicized within the Victorian institutions of history as an emergent, regulated discipline, the private domestic sphere, the educational apparatus of the state, and the institution of the periodical press itself. Each of these institutions is

separate but related--when the interests and practices of one come into conflict with those of another, contradictions arise. A text's narrative attempts to regulate and resolve these contradictions; whether or not this resolution is seen as "believable" or "true" depends on the attendant reading practices that texts engender.

Catherine Belsey argues, "Without assuming that a text independently generates a determinate, transhistorical and universally recognizable reading, it can of course be argued not only that an intimate relationship exists between ideology and specific reading practices, but also that these reading practices are fostered by some texts rather than others" (56). Although periodicals, reviews, and reviewers may seem to represent only the singular "opinions" of, for instance, a particular literary identity amid a range of competing opinions in the field of cultural production, each text also assumes and therefore creates a readership for itself. Readerships are created on the basis of a form of ideological consent or dispute. The reading subject "identifies" with a periodical by either agreeing or opposing what is presented in it, and thereby defines his or her autonomous, self-regulating, identity in contrast or in agreement with the other.[4] The Victorian periodical operates as an important site for ideological identification to occur, in that the periodical deals primarily in "identity" as its selling feature. Brake writes, "the illusion of a characteristic 'identity' (whether eclectic or singular) is one of the constitutive conditions of newspapers and periodicals, as commodities competing in the market-place and as forms of cultural production" (11). Here Brake refers specifically to the "identity" of a periodical or newspaper itself, but I think it could be argued that the "identity" of a periodical in turn determines the ways in which gendered, racial

and sexual "identities"--of other publications, of ordinary readers, of heroes, etc--will be represented. The identity of a periodical defines its status as a commodity and gives rise to the commodified identities of "eminent Victorians" (as presented in specific periodicals) who come to represent various beliefs, practices, and meanings within the social order.

Because the authority of Victorian biography lay in its claims to historical and factual truth about a subject's public and private life, readers have come to read biographies as repositories of information rather than as literary or imaginative texts. This was true of nineteenth-century reading practices and remains one of the dominant modes of reading biography in current historical and literary scholarship. Similar to the way in which biography has often been mined for historical "information," Victorian periodicals have traditionally been useful for literary critics as "sources" rather than as "texts."[5] According to Laurel Brake, this tendency grew out of a disciplinary need to distinguish between journalistic and literary criticism when English became institutionalized as an academic subject in the nineteenth century. Brake targets formalism as the force which assigned textuality to certain forms of writing--the novel, the poem--to the exclusion of "mass" (and therefore "debased") kinds of writing. Modernist criticism focused on what was deemed the singular and inherent properties of the text, to the exclusion of the modes of production and circulation which conditioned a text's meaning in relation to other texts. The distinction made here between a text and its mode of production points to the larger critical and theoretical question of the relationship between literature and history.

In a project such as mine, which tries to read texts historically, the temptation is to assign to history the power of the metanarrative, as though history itself is not a mediated and conflicted set of representations within language. Drawing on Marx's model of base and superstructure,[6] literature and history are often separated into different orders of knowledge and inquiry, where history is privileged as both the foundation and the final referent of literature. But as Tony Bennett asks, how do we understand history, especially when placed alongside of literature, when history as a disciplined, regulated form of knowledge is itself the subject? In my project, there are two historical/literary subjects of investigation--the biographies and the periodical reviews of them. Both of these kinds of writing have been typically relegated to the order of the "historical" rather than the "literary" text. I have tried not to assign to the reviews an explanatory power over the biographies themselves, for this would imply that the biographies are somehow more "textual" than the reviews of them.[7] Rather, I have tried to read both Mill's *Autobiography* and Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* as mediated texts located within the related Victorian institutions of literature, history, and the periodical press. This has necessitated an attentiveness to the ways in which various cultural institutions were disaggregated and disciplined in the Victorian period as new territories of cultural expertise and authority were claimed by men of a professionalizing bourgeois class.

Tony Bennett's example of reading historically and "institutionally" has provided the following two chapters with a model of how to read both for and against the historical truth claims any text makes.

> Imperfect though it is, it is only to this unstable, always provisional and forever changing 'historical past' that propositional statements about the past can be referred for the adjudication of their truth claims. The degree to which this enables the 'historical past' to serve also as a check on the broader terrain of historical representations constituted by the historical public sphere, however, is not given by the past itself. Rather, it depends on the relations which obtain between the practice of history and the other institutional contexts and discursive regimes within which representations of the past are produced and circulated (57).

In other words, although one looks to the historical record to assess the truth claims of any given text, the historical record itself must be regarded as a situated institution, mediated by its relation to other institutions and ways of knowing about the past. Therefore, I have tried to think of the texts I examine in this project as mutually informative, as referring not only to each other, but also to the institutions in which they are located and to the body of readers and reading practices which make up those institutions. Although both biographies are ostensibly "about" particular historical subjects--John Stuart Mill and Charlotte Brontë--I have tried to read the biographies as particular moments of representation which adhere to the strictures of the genre, so that both texts are as much about an individual as about the ways in which particular individuals are expected to be framed and constituted within language. This does not mean that I view texts as a series of representations with no grounding in extra-discursive reality, for without a shared (if contingent) agreement of certain historical realities, there can be no basis from which to make sense of the meaning of the past within the present. Charlotte Brontë's physical and mental pain, for instance, is read not only as a representation of illness, but also as a material reality represented in language whose meaning for the Victorian readership can be interpreted according to

the ways in which the periodical reviewers responded to it and contextualized it within the dominant frames of intelligibility about the woman as writer.

What I have tried to avoid is the appearance of a "reception study" which does little more than map out reactions to texts with no attempt to situate audiences and individual readers within their historical and cultural framework, for, in Jon Klancher's words, "audiences are not simply aggregates of readers. They are complicated textual and social formations; they have interpretive tendencies and ideological contours" (6). The biographies I examine in this project, and some of the more infamous reactions to them, are among the most canonical of English biographical writings of the nineteenth century--the work of tracing their reception has been done for the most part. My intervention into this kind of work theorizes the relationship between what was perceived as the individuated, differentiated subject of biography and the classed, gendered reading public whose "opinion" about a particular biography and its subject shaped the cultural and social formation of that individual as a simultaneously "known" and "unknown" figure in the public domain. This kind of work demands the delineation of the historical and social forces which make up a social body known as an audience.

II

The amount of critical essays appearing in the Victorian press which ruminated on the purpose and the effects of biography attest to its cultural and social authority as a form of writing and its alterations over time.[8] A brief overview of the history of Victorian biography reveals at least a few "themes" in its general transformation throughout the century. Of chief concern were issues of accuracy, ethics, suppression,

and form. Falsification or carelessness with the facts of a life was usually deemed the greatest of a biographer's sins, and was viewed as a serious breach of the biographer's professional and moral duty to represent "reality." But what exactly constituted the reality of the subject was seriously debated by writers throughout the period. In the 1830s, Thomas Carlyle--probably the century's most famous biographer himself--theorized that the subject's shortcomings and failures as well as "his" triumphs were essential to biography. "Several men, as we hear, cry out, 'See, there is something written not entirely pleasant to me!' Good friend, it is a pity; but who can help it? They that will crowd about bonfires may, sometimes very fairly, get their beards singed" (Carlyle, *Scott*, 300). But later critics of the genre, including Margaret Oliphant, asserted that one's motive for writing a biography was the most important consideration in the interpretation of a life, and that unflattering facts or events in the subject's life must be suppressed in order to preserve the reputation of the subject before "the unthinking satisfaction of the common public in such revelations of domestic privacy as it could not have hoped for, the crystallized gossip which is always 'so interesting' to the crowd'" (Oliphant 93). Sidney Lee's Cambridge lecture delivered in 1911 seems to suggest that the pendulum had swung back to the side of "truth" in biography. Lee declared that "the biographer is a narrator, not a moralist, and candour is the salt of his narrative" (41). The foregone conclusion underlining these opinions was that biographies were always written and published posthumously, for "the careers of living men are incomplete, because death withholds the finishing touch. Death is a part of life, and no man is fit subject for biography till he is dead" (36). The subject's death

had as much to do with issues of form as it did with privacy and suppression, for the conclusion of the biographical writings was usually synonymous with the mortality of the hero.

Recent criticism of the social function and effects of the Victorian biography deconstructs many of the genre's conventions which are inflected with specific gendered, classed, and racial assumptions about the representation of subjectivity in cultural texts.[9] Until relatively recently, Victorian biography has been read for its historical rather than its literary value and, deploying traditional methods of "reading history," critics straightforwardly appeal to biographies on the basis of the "information" they supply, tending to ignore such issues as the cultural and political situatedness of the biographer and the indeterminacy of language itself as a means of conveying "reality." As Regenia Gagnier articulates, "The text is only one 'moment' in a circuit of production, circulation, and consumption of cultural artifacts, and its meaning depends upon its relation to other 'moments'" (6). Critics of the biographical and autobiographical genres often read specific lives in isolation, as though the texts and the subjectivities represented within them operate outside the literary and historical institutions which confer meaning upon them.

Another of the commonplaces about biography involves assumptions about its social purpose. A random sampling of statements by writers and critics from the Victorian period to our own shows that assumptions about biography have typically centred around rather uncomplicated notions of the subject that post-structuralism and feminism have problematized.

"The history of mankind is the history of its great men: to find out these, clean the dirt from them, and place them on their proper pedestal" (Carlyle, qtd in Nicholson 11).

"In biography the object of study is the man himself; and the same rules which forbid any intrusion of subjectivity into all other pursuits, demand that here nothing else shall have place, but mere delineation and portraiture" (Goodbrand 23).

"Biography exists to satisfy a natural instinct in man--the commemorative instinct--the universal desire to keep alive the memories of those who by character and exploits have distinguished themselves from the mass of mankind" (Lee 7).

When we say a man acts out character, do we mean that the character we have imputed to him is thus shown to be a slightly inaccurate version? Or do we mean that on certain rare occasions a man can act contrary to his character as it really is? Whatever the right answer to these questions may be, they are questions which the great biographers, like the great novelists, insistently force us to ask (Cockshut 15).

These quotations illustrate the ways in which biography has typically been read as an uncomplicated source of historical information. The (unified) subject of biography is usually gendered male and is white and middle class. What is obscured in this representation of subjectivity is the necessity of the "mass" reading public upon whose apparent homogeneity the difference of the hero is made intelligible. Furthermore, these critics of biography assume that subjectivity is formulated and understood only through singular texts and authors who seem to operate independently of the literary marketplace. I suggest, on the other hand, that subjectivity is socially understood and determined by the productive forces of literary, historical, political, and domestic institutions which organize and circulate both particular subjectivities and the "masses" against which they are defined and differentiated.

Another of the classic observations made about Victorian society is that it seemed to need exemplary models of genius and moral strength, the facts of whose

lives could be recorded and disseminated to a reading audience hungry for master narratives of heroic acts. Perhaps another of our stereotypes about the Victorians is that they were more conscious than any other social order in history of their "age," or their "period." Therefore, the narratives of the lives of "eminent Victorians" were never simply or exclusively about the subjects themselves, but about their larger social context.[10] The age produced the life, the life in turn produced the age. If it is true that Victorian readers craved edifying master narratives of literary and other kinds of genius which were seen as "truthful" or "factual," then Victorian biography would constitute an important site from which to examine the Victorian reading public as a specific moment in the history of the consumption of literary texts and of "celebrities." As Trev Broughton observes, "The practice of biography became a cultural space in which familiar social configurations were unsettled and rethought" (551) and, as opposed to other genres like the novel which were also appealed to for edification and social commentary, readers' expectations for what biography promised to deliver were perhaps even stronger than they were for other genres, based on biography's claims to truth in the documentation of "real lives." Following Broughton's logic here--that biographical writing served to interrogate social relationships and orders--how does one read a text like John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, which presents a narrative of subjective unity and coherence which was achieved according to a developmental model of psychic, moral, and intellectual progression very much in keeping with a Victorian notion of the growth of the individual subject? I argue that although the effect of texts like Mill's *Autobiography* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* questioned

the constitution of "normal" social relationships for men and women, the *nature* of the subjectivities both texts represented was consistent with Victorian notions of individuality, progress, and agency. "[A]n individualizing elaboration of subjectivity" shown by both texts I investigate brought with it a version of an interior, private existence which could be mined for the explanations and solutions it offered to one's public/social appearance (Poovey, *Making*, 21).

Women's life-writing from the Victorian period has been systematically ignored in favour of the tradition of biographies and autobiographies of men of letters, literary geniuses, etc. This has everything to do with conceptions of what constitutes subjectivity and history. The central mandate of Harold Nicholson's *The Development of English Biography* (1927) was to differentiate between what he called "pure" and "impure" biographical writing. Beginning with ancient runic inscriptions and the hagiographies of the sixth century ("a pregnant source of bad biography", he writes), and culminating in Lytton Strachey, Nicholson's history applied a prescriptive set of principles to a diverse array of (male-authored) biographical texts (17). "Impure" biographies were those which either celebrated the dead, used the life as an illustration of a theory or idea, or relied too heavily on the "undue subjectivity" of the biographer (9). Omitted from Nicholson's text completely were biographical writings by and about women, although he refers to Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) as an example of an impure biography which is more "a sentimental novel replete with local colour" than a history and, in the case of Gaskell's rendering of Branwell Brontë, "sheer, inexcusable fiction" (128). Nicholson's book contributes to the tradition of

criticism about biographical writings which see the self as a unified and stable entity, gendered male, which can be recovered "objectively" through a transparently-referential language and an explanatory narrative of developmental progress.

David Amigoni's *Victorian Biography: Intellectuals and the Ordering of Discourse* (1993) departs from this tradition when he examines the relationship between Victorian biography and the formation of separate and discrete academic disciplines. Relying heavily on Foucauldian notions of the classification of discourses and the author function,[11] Amigoni's book traces the cultural uses of biography by newly-professionalized intellectuals throughout the nineteenth century who wanted to claim an elite, disinterested authority in such areas as history, literature, and political economy, while trying to popularize their discipline before a mass audience whose reading practices were seen as insufficiently contained or governed by the strictures of the increasing disciplinarity of knowledge within the ancient English universities. Amigoni writes that "the 'biography of the statesman' became the strategic tool of an intellectual formation which was committed to the reconstruction of public opinion through history as a discipline" (92). Literary criticism, he shows, was systematically "limited" due to its "slightly untrustworthy, often aberrant rhetorical practice" in relation to the "sovereign thresholds of historical discourse" (120-21); biographical writing (Amigoni concentrates on the 'English Men of Letters' series published by Macmillan) was invoked by intellectuals in an attempt to subdue the rhetorical energies of what had been demarcated "literature".

Amigoni's study is useful to my project, because it delineates the cultural and

political use-value of biography as a genre within one particular domain of British social formation--the academy. His emphasis on the constructedness of the statesman and the man of letters in biographical writings for ideological purposes undercuts the transcendency of the subjectivities of the white, middle and upper class men of which he writes. I trace Amigoni's descriptions of the development of disciplinary history and its absorption of the genre of biography in Chapter Two when I examine Elizabeth Gaskell's significant interventions and contributions to the genre. Yet Amigoni says little about nineteenth century women's biographical writing in general, presumably because he does not see its relevance to the development of academic disciplinarity in the period.[12]

Supplementing Amigoni's work, Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* opens up a way for me to think about the political history of literary genres from a feminist standpoint. Armstrong's book locates the rise of the modern middle class subject within and around the domestic novel and the conduct book. These texts represented women as having an authority based on psychological qualities, rather than on fortune or rank, and generated a desire for an idealized woman among a burgeoning middle class before it was fully recognized as a social formation. Represented according to specific generic conventions, the middle-class woman was in fact the first modern individual whose moral authority became the model for the entire middle class.

Whether or not one agrees with Armstrong's thesis, it is the implications of her argument which I find most productive: generic conventions are not arbitrarily assigned to aesthetic artifacts, but in fact politically arrange and produce, among other things,

gendered and classed subjectivities. The kind of cultural work the biography was expected to perform differed significantly from that of the novel or the conduct book or the treatise. This becomes particularly evident when one examines the different kinds of reactions to different genres in reviews.[13] Typically, the kind of cultural work that was expected from biography was the documentation of the public (and increasingly the private) lives of representative individuals of bourgeois English masculinity. English literary biography defined itself and was defined as a middle-class, masculinist genre by virtue of the general absence of parallel histories of women and the working class within the genre.[14] Armstrong argues that the production of the female ideal in nineteenth-century domestic ideology cannot be understood apart from the development of the novel in which "truths" about her were presented. Similarly, Victorian biography can be viewed as a site in which literary masculinities were organized according to generic patterns of coherence and development which made the Victorian hero the "natural" subject of history.

Armstrong contends that by the middle of the nineteenth century in England, social relations had become inextricably bound up with writings "which represented the existing field of social information as contrasting masculine and feminine spheres" (8-9). That is, the definitions of what constituted a stable masculinity and femininity could not be comprehended apart from the writings which represented them. Much recent critical work like Armstrong's on Victorian gender and sexuality operates from the historical knowledge that separate spheres ideology clearly divided and defined labour, moral outlook and intellectual capacity along the line of sexual difference.[15]

Illuminating histories of sexual slippage in Victorian biomedical discourse[16] demonstrate, however, that sexual difference, and the social arrangements which were supposedly predicated upon that difference, were not fixed or monolithic. Although the one-sex model of sexuality, which posited that two genders were mapped on to a single sex, was slowly and unevenly replaced by a model of two separate sexes and two genders, residual notions of the one-sex paradigm continued to surface in many kinds of Victorian writings, including biomedical texts on human sexuality. Victorian anxieties about the body as a site of instability, permeability, and excess demanded control and surveillance of the body through discursively- and socially-constructed modes of regulation. Histories of sexual slippage highlight separate spheres not as a description of actual conditions but *as* an ideology which performed the work of covering over the inconsistencies and contradictions in writings and knowledges about human sexuality. By focusing on sexual slippage in the Victorian period, I do not mean to imply that women's lives were not materially affected by the social divisions and prohibitions which resulted from separate spheres ideology, or that Victorians "enjoyed" a free-wheeling, sexual ambiguity. Rather, I suggest that sexual slippage probably contributed to social anxieties about sexuality and gender which separate spheres ideology and the two-sex model tried to alleviate.

In these essays I argue that the creation of the literary and sexual reputations of men and women of letters in the popular Victorian imagination is in part related to expectations about the kinds of work certain genres of literature are intended to carry out, and the kinds of writers who will perform that work. In writing of James Froude's

biography of Carlyle, Trev Broughton argues that the disputes Froude's text precipitated were in part about biography itself, demonstrating to the later student of the controversy that "social and cultural boundaries--issues of gender and genre for example--are co-extensive" (552). Similarly, I argue in Chapter Two that reactions to Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* were rooted in trepidations about the subject of the biography herself, but also in anxieties about Gaskell's intervention into the masculinist tradition of biography/history. I describe how Gaskell negotiates Brontë's "painful history" in relation to her own position in the literary marketplace as primarily a novelist. I show how the knowledge of Brontë as a private, suffering woman artist became the site of literary, authorial contestation and competition for Gaskell and her critics. Reviewers' responses to Gaskell's representation of Brontë's authorial and feminine identity had as much to do with reviewers' attitudes towards Gaskell as a first-time biographer as they did with Gaskell's subject. Part of Gaskell's claim to authority in writing the biography was that she had a sympathetic understanding of Brontë's pain based on her first-hand knowledge of the Brontë family history in Yorkshire. This kind of claim allowed her the leverage to negotiate between responsibility to her subject and to public opinion.

In Chapter Three, I describe how John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* adheres to a developmental model of interior growth and maturity which privileges mental progress as the centre of Mill's identity. I examine how reviewers responded with unease to Mill's descriptions of his father's system of education as they managed and made sense of Mill's "unnatural genius." James Mill's private, unsupervised pedagogical methods

came under attack as the explanation for what was perceived as John Stuart Mill's untenable prescriptions for a liberal, free society. These criticisms were levelled under the aegis of "public opinion" towards the educational institutions as sites of knowledge production and subject formation.

Notes

1.Hennessy's *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* poses solutions to the apparent impasse between what are described as post-modern analyses of local discourses and a global social analytic for materialist feminism. Postmodernism's detailed descriptions of local and contingent sites of power, struggle, and resistance are appropriated by a materialist feminist analysis which argues that local and apparently isolated domains of production are actually linked by dint of their relationship to capitalism: "A global social theory premised on the notion that each productive sphere at any moment is determined by and determining of other spheres also makes visible how the division of labor and the distribution of extracted surplus are related to patterns of production and consumption which are affected by and in turn shape political and ideological structures" (31). I try to situate my specific readings of each of the biographies historically, to explain how related spheres of ideological and material production determine and are determined by the representation of subjectivities.

2.Jon Klancher demonstrates how "mass" writers--novelists and journalists--created a "mass" audience by attempting to situate individual readers within actual and imaginary social conditions. Rather than abstract readers from social formations, one strategy writers employed was to create powerful crowd scenes in which "a 'mass' audience would discover itself in what it read" (76). Mill's notion of the powerful force of public opinion can be likened to the undifferentiated crowd.

3.Hennessy describes symptomatic reading as a politicization and historicization of Freud's concept of the symptom. Hegemonic ideology obscures historical forces by a process of condensation, displacement, and substitution. The work of the political unconscious surfaces in the form of symptoms, rupturing the consistency and coherence of accepted social truths. The symptoms of the political unconscious indicate a logic which operates underneath or outside of the dominant one.

4.That the reading individual is constituted as "a subject" is the ultimate effect of ideology. Althusser writes, "the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that *the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting'*

concrete individuals as subjects (Althusser 93).

5. My understanding of "text" rests on the assumption that the text is a linguistic (or non-linguistic) signifying system that is organized according to generally accepted codes of meaning and understanding. The function, operation, and value of a text is produced by institutions and by methodologies which bestow social meaning upon it. The text operates as an ideological tool whose "autonomy" is relative to the institutions which produce its value. A text cannot be consulted, therefore, for its historical "truth," because no text signifies transcendent value.

6.My understanding of base and superstructure and related Marxist concepts is derived from Raymond Williams's reading of Marx and Gramsci in *Marxism and Literature*, 75-136. See also Williams's "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", 377-390, in Davis and Schleifer, eds.

7.I do not mean to imply by this, however, that Victorian reviews and reviewing practices are not good indicators of public opinion. They certainly do offer valuable insights into public opinion and its use as an ideological tool, more so than, for instance, a diary or a sermon or even a letter to the editor of a periodical.

8. Ira Nadel's collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century essays on Victorian biography is a good source of primary materials. See also Nadel's *Biography: Fiction, Fact & Form* which discusses the relationship between the conventions of fiction and literary biography.

9.In using the word "subjectivity," I follow Gagnier's example by referring to the term's broad range of meanings: the subject as an "I" unto itself, as an oppositional "Other" both to others and to itself, as a subject of knowledge, as a separate, material body, and as an oppositional entity to an object within the Cartesian dichotomy of subject and object (8).

10.See Amigoni, 1, on the "cult of exemplarity."

11.Foucault's *The Order of Things* offers an account of the ways in which "statements" are historically organized according to disciplinary categories which control their meaning and use. In "What is an Author?", Foucault historically situates the function of authors and authorship vis-a-vis the modes of discourse and their relative degrees of social authority and legitimation. "The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" (Foucault 107).

12. Feminist historians such as Joan Burstyn demonstrate that the consolidation of disciplinarity in nineteenth-century British educational institutions relied on the felt need to establish gendered knowledges which would effectively prohibit women from certain forms of study. The process of excluding women from literary study in the

university, for instance, contributed to the creation of the man of letters as the protector of a national literary culture.

13.It is particularly interesting when expectations for different genres such as the biography and the novel overlap in the reviews. In Chapter Two, I examine how some reviewers of Gaskell's biography charged her with fictionalising her subject's life--one of the concerns about biography in the Victorian period concerned the extent to which it intersected with fiction.

14. I do not mean to suggest that no life-writings about women or the working class existed in the nineteenth century, but that self-representation by women and the working poor would not have been included under the aegis of English biography in this period. See Regenia Gagnier for feminist readings of Victorian working-class autobiography.

15. See Davidoff, L'Esperance, and Newby, "Landscape with Figures: Home and Community in English Society" in (eds.) Mitchell and Oakley; Catherine Hall, "The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology" in Burman (ed.); Jill Conway, "Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution" in (ed.) Vicinus; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*: *Men and Women of the English Middle Class*, 1780-1850; Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*; Janet Wolff, "The Culture of Separate Spheres: The Role of Culture in Nineteenth-Century Public and Private Life" in Wolff.

16. See Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex* and *Unstable Bodies* by Jill Matus.

TWO

Made Perfect By Sufferings: Charlotte Brontë

The critical and popular fascination with Charlotte Brontë began long before Elizabeth Gaskell was approached by Patrick Brontë in 1855 to write a recuperative biography of his daughter which would answer to "a great many scribblers, as well as some clever and truthful writers, [who] have published Articles, in Newspapers, and tracts--respecting my dear Daughter Charlotte" (Easson 372). By 1905, the Brontë family history had become thoroughly mythologized in the popular imagination as Henry James' observation attests: "The personal position of the three sisters, of the two in particular, has been marked, in short, with so sharp an accent that this accent has become for us the very tone of their united production . . . it embodies, really, the most complete intellectual muddle, if the term be not extravagant, ever achieved, on a literary question, by our wonderful public" (Stoneman, *Transformations*, 74). Patrick Brontë's appeal to Gaskell to authorize a definitive version of Charlotte's private history established what has come to be received as the "intent" of Gaskell's biography--to heal Charlotte's ailing, precarious public reputation before a reading audience still largely uncomfortable with the idea of the woman writer. By the time James complained about the "intellectual muddle" surrounding the Brontë mythology, Charlotte Brontë had passed from a sexually-suspect, "coarse", and unnatural woman novelist to a martyred, suffering genius, emotionally crippled by the wild Yorkshire moors from whence she came. The awareness and unease with the representation of Charlotte as sufferer, both physical and mental is common to both Patrick Brontë's and

James' ruminations on Charlotte's reputation, if differently motivated. By the end of the nineteenth century, the identity of the author of the sensational *Jane Eyre* no longer inspired "scandalous" speculation and sexual innuendo; rather, pity for her circumstances and an almost religious adoration of her "sacrifice" had displaced the suggestion that Brontë was "improper", "coarse", and "unnatural." What was at stake in both of these representations was the control and the ownership of the construction of Brontë's "ailing" subjectivity in the context of a newly-developing profession of letters which was exclusionary towards women writers. In other words, what kinds of interests--professional or otherwise--were met when Gaskell and her reviewers chose to emphasize Brontë's physical and mental pain as the fundamental component of her subjectivity? Within what kinds of discourses and practices were these interests located?

I want to suggest in this chapter that Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* and the social effects of her biography as manifested in the periodical press after its publication, represent an important moment in the history of the Victorian middle-class reading public and its attitude toward the middle-class woman as a professional writer of "genius". The truth of Brontë's physical frailty is a thread which runs through Gaskell's text and is one which gets taken up by reviewers looking for the "explanation" for Brontë's life and her writing. As Deirdre D'Albertis has observed of Gaskell's *Life*, the preoccupation with Brontë's health "informs not only the biography's ordering and presentation of events in Brontë's career, but also support[s] the book as a whole with a determining logic of morbidity" (4). It is my intent in this

chapter to trace the social and cultural meanings attached to Brontë's pain by examining what the "morbid logic" of Gaskell's text reveals about the expectations attached to the genre of biography in the mid-1850s, particularly as those expectations were inflected by gendered, racial, and class tensions. In mapping out the cultural and social significance of Brontë's physical and mental illness, I examine Gaskell's complex negotiations between her subject's bodily pain, and public opinion. How does Gaskell confront the social responsibility of the biographer to the "truth" of her subject, while she adheres to audience expectations about biography as primarily a male-centred genre? What, in turn, do her reviewers make of her representation of Brontë as a suffering, artistic genius and what kinds of concerns make up their critique? By taking up these kinds of questions, this study offers an account of the way in which the literary subjectivities and public reputations of both biographical subjects and their authors were forged in the Victorian period out of the classed and gendered ideologies which bisected Victorian cultural institutions.[1]

I

The critical uproar over *Jane Eyre*, the gossip and rumour which surrounded the question of her gender and her sexual experience,[2] and the eventual half-knowledge that Ellis, Acton, and Currer Bell were the daughters of a poor and eccentric Yorkshire clergyman, all contributed to the public fascination with the Brontë reputation, well before Gaskell published her biography. An unsigned notice of Gaskell's *Life* in the *Manchester Examiner and Times* in April of 1857 rehearses the surprised reaction to the discovery of the identity of Currer Bell: "Notwithstanding all her fame and glory,

the world knew little of Miss Brontë; and not until after her short but glorious career of earthly fame had terminated was it patent to the people in this district, that a few miles over the Yorkshire hills had been living and suffering, the celebrated 'Currer Bell,' " (Easson 388). Many of the earliest reviews of the *Life* refer to that speculation at the end of the 1840s about Brontë's identity, demonstrating the force of the cultural and social anxiety which must have been associated with that uncertainty. The growing need of the reading public to associate writings with particular identities reveals that by the 1840s and 50s, when the practice of anonymous and psuedonymous publishing was still common, the Victorian reader could no longer make assumptions about the gender and social class of the individual author. In this period, I argue, the force of the genre of literary biography was that it helped to uncover and explain authorial identities as they simultaneously contributed to and departed from their published work.

Gaskell recognized early on that Charlotte Brontë/Currer Bell, as an identity and a mythology, had become a saleable commodity. Her own interest in Brontë's identity, as separate from her writings, is apparent in her 1850 letter to Lady Kay Shuttleworth. Evidently, Kay Shuttleworth had suggested Gaskell be introduced to Brontë, to which Gaskell eagerly replied, "I should like to hear a great deal more about her, as I have been so much interested in what she has written. I don't mean merely in the story and mode of narration, wonderful as that is, but in the glimpses one gets of *her*, and her modes of thought, and, all unconsciously to herself, of the way in which she has suffered. I wonder if she suffers *now*" (Chapple 116). It is significant that the very first time Brontë's name surfaces in Gaskell's letters, it is connected with

suffering, suggesting that illness was an element which structured the foreknowledge of the woman as writer. Furthermore, in the same letter, Gaskell refers to the idea of helping Brontë in some way, and the emphasis on health and strength which D'Albertis notices in Gaskell's text, especially in connection with Brontë's name, appears: "I am half amused to find you think I could do her good . . . I *never* feel as if I could do any one good--I never yet was conscious of strengthening any one, and I do so feel to want strength, and to want faith. I suppose we all *do* strengthen each other by clashing together, and earnestly talking our own thoughts, and ideas. The very disturbance we thus are to each other rouses us up, and makes us more healthy" (Chapple 116).

Gaskell's early impulse to document Brontë's life after meeting her for the first time is evident in her 1850 letter to her friend Catherine Winkworth, which she begins by providing a detailed, and rather unforgiving, description of Brontë's physical appearance. "She is, (as she calls herself) *undeveloped*; thin and more than half a head shorter than I, soft brown hair not so dark as mine; eyes (very good and expressive looking straight & open at you) of the same colour, a reddish face; large mouth & many teeth gone; altogether *plain*; the forehead square, broad, and *rather* overhanging" (Chapple 123). Her account of Haworth parsonage and the Brontë family history in this letter reads like a truncated version of what was eventually to become a two-volume work. After Brontë's death in 1855, and shortly before she received the formal request from Patrick Brontë to write the biography, Gaskell wrote to Brontë's publisher, George Smith, suggesting that she would like to "put down every thing I remembered about this dear friend and noble woman, before its vividness had faded from my mind .

. . the time may come when her wild sad life, and the beautiful character that grew out of it may be made public . . . [I could describe] the wild bleakness of Haworth & speaking of the love & honour in which she was held there. But you will see that this sort of record of her could not be made public at present without giving pain" (Chapple 348). Gaskell writes to Smith that her account of Brontë would be for personal satisfaction and for the benefit of her daughters, a common publishing strategy among women writers who did not want to appear aggressive or interested in public recognition, but who were eager to take on a literary project. Gaskell's act of writing to Smith suggests an interest in writing Brontë's life, but veils the suggestion within a properly feminine modesty about whom the account is for--that is, a private, rather than a public audience.

Gaskell represents pain as Brontë's primary subjective experience. The two-volume biography begins and ends in the Haworth parsonage graveyard, thereby casting Brontë's death as the motive and the culmination of Gaskell's text. Gaskell conforms to the conventions of Victorian life-writing when she initiates her text with the "death" of her subject by citing the inscription on Charlotte's grave stone. This gesture also serves to establish the notion of Brontë's martyred immortality--a move that is consistent with one of the perceived functions of the literary biography in the nineteenth century. Although the reader expects that, like most biographical accounts of the lives of celebrated Victorians, the death of the subject constitutes the "goal" of the biographical text as the event towards which all others progress, Gaskell subverts the momentum of the text by presenting the death of her subject as the generative moment

of Brontë's written life.[3] The intervening chapters chart a series of bodily and mental crises which Brontë undergoes before finally returning to the text's origin--the grave. Pain, then, literally occupies the centre of Gaskell's narrative. Since the identity of the individual by definition constitutes the centre of the genre of biography, Brontë's pain is doubly reinforced by the structure of the text as well as the moments of her life which Gaskell selects as definitive.

In what ways does Gaskell gain access to her subject's pain and what does her representation tell us about her own interests in locating pain as the centre of Brontë's identity? One version of Gaskell's intentions in authorizing *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* has tended to emphasize Gaskell as a figure of sympathy and nurturance; her documentation of her friend's strife is seen as an example of Gaskell's feminine selfless devotion consistent with her Christian socialist worldview and her commitment to women's proper mission. More recently, Deirdre D'Albertis departs from this interpretation and argues compellingly that a strong element of literary competition between herself and Brontë entered into Gaskell's biography, based on competing versions of literary authority and duty which subsequently affected Gaskell's construction of Brontë as a suffering artist. D'Albertis reads Gaskell's *Life* as an implicit critique of the romantic connection between physical pain and artistic greatness; rather than allow Brontë to wallow in her private (therefore selfish) misery, D'Albertis argues, Gaskell found an opportunity in writing Brontë's life, to stress instead the "pragmatics of creativity" which reside in "health, strength, and self-determination", qualities which were seen as necessary for the Victorian (male) writer

to carry out his public duty, and which Gaskell implicitly claims as her own basis for authority.[4]

D'Albertis's thesis is important to my own arguments because she pursues it by contextualising the position of the woman writer at a time when new models of literary authority were being worked out in emergent cultural and social institutions. But where D'Albertis reads Gaskell's *Life* as a "disparagement" of Charlotte's pain based on Gaskell's own desires to "find a foothold" (20) in a male-dominated occupation/profession, I have read Gaskell's understanding of Brontë's pain as an attempt to rehabilitate, rather than deprecate, her subject. Charlotte's "death" at the outset of the first volume of the *Life* provides the impetus for Gaskell to "revive" her subject in order to enter into and "explain" the significance of her sorrow to the reading public. Furthermore, if bodily pain constitutes the most private and specific of subjective experiences which can never be truly shared between and among individuals, then why does Gaskell choose to historicize and disperse Brontë's pain among the other members of the Brontë family, the people of Yorkshire, and ultimately the readers of her text? I will return to this point below. For now, I want to signal the importance of Gaskell's contextualization of Brontë's illness as not solely the guarantee of her difference, but as the consistent and logical outcome of her geographical isolation and her circumstances as a woman writer of underprivileged economic and class status. Brontë's pain, however it was discursively rendered, was not merely a rhetorical trope or an opportunity for Gaskell to carve out a space for herself in the literary marketplace, but a material, bodily reality directly related to the Brontë family's class

position.

"For a right understanding of the life of my dear friend Charlotte Brontë, it appears to me *more necessary in her case than in most others*, that the reader should be made acquainted with the peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her earliest years were passed, and from which both her own and her sisters' first impressions of human life must have been received" (*Life* 60). At this particular moment in the text, Gaskell does not explain with any specificity why it is so essential to locate her subject within her social context, over and above the case of other biographical subjects, but the remainder of the text points to Gaskell's ambivalent need to both differentiate Brontë from her context, and to prove that she is *of* her time and space as well. By "context", I mean the social, political, and cultural organization of the institutions in which Brontë lived, both local and national, the material realities and histories of the rural Yorkshire population, and the Yorkshire landscape itself.

The adjectives Gaskell uses to describe the inhabitants of Keighly and the surrounding district are too numerous to be named here, but they are essential to Gaskell's project of establishing the appearance of the sameness of the "wild, rough population" into whose midst Patrick Brontë imported his fragile wife and their six children. Gaskell sets up the arrival of the "gentle, delicate" Brontë family by constructing a homogenous mass of coarse, uncouth, and lawless individuals whose geographical solitude, dislike of authority, and stoic "indifference to human life" (65) breed fancies, manias, crime, violence, religious zeal, and drunken riots. She adds, "public opinion was only a distant and inarticulate echo of some clearer voice sounding

behind the sweeping horizon" (67).[5] Keighley's distance and isolation from the civilizing influence of public opinion emanating from metropolitan centres renders it a kind of nightmarish "private" space which breeds undue forms of self-reliance and resistance to authority. Although the population is continually figured as "powerful" and "fierce," it is not the kind of strength which Gaskell admires or endorses, but is a kind of force which has the properties of common and tenacious weeds. In keeping with Gaskell's classed and racialized rhetoric, then, Brontë grows like a flower out of this ground, but inevitably takes on the sick and diseased properties of Haworth and Yorkshire by virtue of her proximity to them.

In an 1850 letter to Charlotte Froude which Gaskell wrote shortly after meeting Brontë, Gaskell writes,

> Her faults are the faults of the very peculiar circumstances in which she has been placed; and she possesses a charming union of simplicity and power; and a strong feeling of responsibility for the Gift, which . . . has [been] given her. She is very little & very plain. Her stunted person she ascribes to the scanty supply of food she had as a growing girl . . . She is the last of six; lives in an out of the way village in the Yorkshire Moors with a wayward eccentric wild father,--their parsonage facing the North--no flowers or shrub or tree can grow in the plot of ground, on account of the biting winds (Chapple 128).

Brontë embodies the harshness of the environment. That is, Gaskell's description of Brontë's physicality invokes the geo-physical condition of the moors themselves, so that Brontë's "stunted" body is like the shrub or flower which struggles to grow in a hostile environment, surviving at all odds the "biting winds" of Yorkshire. The general hostility and lawlessness of the environment and its people, which Gaskell describes with careful particularity in the first chapters of the text, creeps into the Haworth

parsonage and "stamps" itself on Brontë's susceptible and "sickly" imagination, only to be reproduced in her writing years later:

> Painful impressions sink deep into the hearts of delicate and sickly children. What the healthy suffer from but momentarily, and then forget, those who are ailing, brood over involuntarily and remember long--perhaps with no resentment, but simply as a piece of suffering that has been stamped into their very life. The pictures, ideas, and conceptions of character received into the mind of the child of eight years old, were destined to be reproduced in fiery words a quarter of a century after (*Life* 107).

Gaskell draws Yorkshire into "the psychological narrative of individual development," a kind of narrative which Victorian novelists developed as the individual subject became the lens through which class and gender relations could be recognized (Poovey, *Uneven*, 89). Yorkshire can be found at the centre of Brontë's interiority where it festers and grows until it is projected outwards again in the form of Brontë's "fiery" language which, as reviewers were wont to describe it, subsequently "infected" the public imagination. In one way, Brontë is not different from her social and geographical context, but in fact inhabits and *is* the context which, according to the logic of text, subsequently conditions and even guarantees her literary production. That that context is particularly "harsh, uncouth, and unhealthy", serves as the rationale for interpreting the force and difference of Brontë's novels in relation to the writing of men and women whose development presumably takes place in more normative, (middle class, metropolitan) centres. The coarseness of Brontë's novels (a common charge in the reviews of the Brontë fiction) is thus a symptom of the diseased history she shares with the Yorkshire population, not a result of any individual failure. The difference

Gaskell's text creates rests on the knowledge of class and gender difference which divides her subject from her assumed readership.

Haworth parsonage is usually figured as an oasis of monotonous regularity amid a riotous population and severe landscape. This representation of the parsonage serves as a sign of Brontë's superior domestic skills, which Gaskell takes great pains to emphasize throughout the biography as the mark of her subject's femininity. Yet contrary to this appearance of ordered domesticity, Brontë herself describes her inner life as an "explosive" space from which one may catch "glimpses of holy, of inexpressible things" (162). In the *Life*, Gaskell cites a letter Charlotte wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey, in which she reflects,

> I have some qualities that make me very miserable, some feelings that you can have no participation in--that few, very few people in the world can at all understand. I don't pride myself on these peculiarities. I strive to conceal and suppress them as much as I can; but they burst out sometimes and then those who see the explosion despise me, and I hate myself for days afterwards. . .
>
> things that nobody else cares for, enter into my mind and rankle there like venom. I know these feelings are absurd, and therefore I try to hide them, but they only sting the deeper for concealment (164).

These "peculiarities" are described by Gaskell as Brontë's "nervous disturbance", "irritable condition" and a "temporary ailment", yet surely this passage signals the beginnings of the inner conflict Brontë must have experienced between her duty towards her family and her need to write. The "explosions" she alludes to may euphemise the poetry and short stories she had already written. It was shortly after this time that she wrote to poet laureate Robert Southey, asking for his professional advice.

Although she did not name herself in her letter of introduction, Southey surmised her gender and replied, "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation . . . Write poetry for its own sake; not in a spirit of emulation, and not with a view to celebrity" (173). Brontë's reply contained the following:

> In the evenings, I confess, I do think, but I never trouble any one else with my thoughts. I carefully avoid any appearance of preoccupation and eccentricity, which might lead those I live amongst to suspect the nature of my pursuits. . . . I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfill, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself . . . (173).

The emphasis on denial, containment, and suppression in both Brontë's and Southey's letters in the preceding passages highlights the connection that was seen to exist between the writing woman and sickness of mind. Her desire to write is figured as a kind of pathology which must be obliterated before it permanently ruins her natural feminine constitution. Southey's admonition to write in private, "and not with a view to celebrity" signals a powerful argument that began to emerge as writing became a profession dominated by male writers. I will return to this point below. In what is probably the most debated and discussed passage of the biography in modern feminist literary criticism, Gaskell re-enforces the Victorian notion that a woman's private duties to the home and public duties to the pen are irreconcilable:

> Henceforward Charlotte Brontë's existence becomes divided into two parallel currents--her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as

> Charlotte Brontë, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character--not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled (334).

But Gaskell, as a writer herself, cannot represent this division in a woman's identity as wholly untenable or unnatural. One of the ways in which she manages the contradiction between her femininity and her writing self in relation to her subject is to insist that Charlotte's "gift" has been bestowed upon her by God, and that to ignore this calling would be tantamount to sin against Christian duty: "She must not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others" (334). More germane to my reading, however, is Gaskell's strategy of emphasizing her subject's chronic illness. In doing so, Gaskell is able to transfer the explanation for Brontë's writerly self onto her (historicized and contextualized) pain. Brontë's suffering serves as the key not only to the way in which she wrote, but to her act of writing itself.

> It is well that the thoughtless critics, who spoke of the sad and gloomy views of life presented by the Brontës in their tales, should know how such words were wrung out of them by the living recollection of the long agony they suffered. It is well, too, that they who have objected to the representation of coarseness and shrank from it with repugnance, as if such conceptions arose out of the writers, should learn, that, not from the imagination--*not from internal conception--but from the hard cruel facts, pressed down, by external life*, upon their very senses, for long months and years together, did they *write out* what they saw, obeying the stern dictates of their consciences (335, emphasis added).

Significantly, it is at the point in the text, immediately following the invocation of women's relationship to separate spheres ideology and woman's proper duty, that Gaskell chooses to situate her invective against Brontë's "thoughtless critics". By emphasizing the social influences on Brontë's writerly identity, Gaskell "absolves" her

subject of the responsibility for her act of writing. Seen as the vessel of impressions from without, Brontë could only "write out" or expel the unhealthy, "hard cruel facts" of an existence which was at once solitary and socially-mediated. Brontë's illness (equated with her writing) is displaced onto her context; the reading community of critics and the general public is implicated in her suffering when Gaskell chastises critics for compounding Brontë's pain and the "pain" her writing represents. The message is that if critics only understood Brontë's circumstances, they would not have judged her writing and her identity with such blatant prejudice--the "blame" is thus dispersed among readers and among the practice of reviewing itself.

Many have read Gaskell's insistence on the primacy of Brontë's social and geographical location as evidence of Gaskell's need to apologize for the facts of Brontë's life to a public that was still quite suspicious of a country parson's spinster daughter who knew enough about desire to create Edward Rochester.[6] However, Gaskell's interest in the formative social elements of Brontë's development, was also related to a professional desire to engage with the discourse of historical investigation. While many Victorian and contemporary commentators have observed the affinities Gaskell's *Life* shares with her domestic novels, particularly in its attention to "feminine details", few have read Gaskell''s text as an example of a Victorian historical document. As biography was consecrated in the nineteenth century as a legitimate writerly profession, alongside other forms of literary production, biography was also co-opted by professionalizing historians who sought to "discipline" and "regulate the production of new statements relating to the formation and direction of public opinion"

(Amigoni 94). Biography and history began to emerge as mutually-informing systems of knowledge, both dependent upon the collection and assemblage of research material, the careful ordering of events within a consistent and intelligible narrative according to "evidence", and the preservation of an archive (Nadel 68). Both history and biography were also seen as distinctly "masculine" fields of production for numerous reasons and purposes, history because it was firmly rooted as an episteme within the universities to which Victorian women had little access, and biography because it laid claim to the documentation of public life which was seen as the male sphere. Part of the reason *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* is usually read for its novelistic rather than its historic qualities is perhaps because of the notion of Gaskell's "interestedness" in her subject, her suppression of certain events in Brontë's life (most notably her relationship with her Belgian French tutor, Heger), and the inaccuracy of the presentation of certain facts. As biography and history were "disciplined" according to the rigours of method and authorial disinterestedness, Gaskell's biography, while it retained its reputation as one of the great masterpieces of the genre, was often considered an anomalous text which lay somewhere in between the genres of fiction and biography.

Gaskell's insertion of her subject in history informs the logic of her text and affords "Brontë"--the figure of public speculation and debate--a form of social legitimation that reaches beyond memorialization to "truthful record". Needless to say, Gaskell's engagement with the historical, rather than the purely literary at this point in her career, offered, as D'Albertis argues, an important opportunity for her to participate in the regulation of what was to constitute the historical knowledge of

subjectivities, nationhood, and private life. Gaskell's representation of Brontë's illness (metonymized as Yorkshire and as the woman writer) signifies Gaskell's desire to document what is seen as the truth of Brontë's life. Yet the psychological genealogy of the Brontë family also represents the unknowable for Gaskell: "But I do not pretend to be able to harmonize points of character, and account for them, and bring them all into one consistent and intelligible whole. The family with whom I have now to do shot their roots down deeper than I can penetrate. I cannot measure them, much less is it for me to judge them. I have named . . . instances of eccentricity in the father because I hold the knowledge of them to be necessary for a right understanding of the life of his daughter" (*Life* 90). Gaskell declares her powers are limited by the otherness of the Brontës. As a historian/biographer rather than a novelist in the writing of the *Life*, Gaskell suggests that to "solve" the puzzle the Brontës represent would be inaccurate to their complex truth. Unlike those critics who "[go] into gossiping conjectures as to who Currer Bell really is, and [pretend] to decide on what the writer may be from the book" Gaskell's text mobilizes not only a conception of her subject, but of the biographer's function as well. Gaskell carves a space for herself as a sympathetic, interested historian who nevertheless preserves for herself an "immunity" to Brontë's ailing public reputation based on disinterested research and an understanding of the historical record. She achieves this "immunity" by invoking the motives of Victorian literary criticism in contrast to her own :

> Not even the desire to write a 'smart article,' which shall be talked about in London, when the faint mask of the anonymous can be dropped at pleasure if the cleverness of the review be admired--not even

> this temptation can excuse the stabbing cruelty of judgment. Who is he that should say of an unknown woman: 'She must be one who for some sufficient reason has long forfeited the society of her sex'? Is he one who has led a wild and struggling and isolated life,--seeing few but plain and outspoken Northerns, unskilled in the euphuisms which assist the polite world to skim over the mention of vice? (360).[7]

On the surface, this passage signals Gaskell's "feminine" impulse to protect Brontë from the "cruelties" of Victorian reviewing practices, but it also points to Gaskell's deeper need to establish her own authority and duty based on "masculine" empirical and historical knowledge. Gaskell distances her project from the "gossiping conjectures" of literary criticism which, ironically, became one of the charges against her book in the subsequent reviews to which I shall turn in a moment.

Gaskell felt personally wounded by the controversy and anger her book provoked among her general readership because her sense of responsibility to the social translated into an unwillingness to ignore public complaints and suspicions of Brontë's identity.[8] After the publication of her biography, Gaskell complained to her publisher, "Everyone writes to me, whose name has been named I think; or whose grandmother's great uncle once removed has been alluded to. Today I receive a letter from Ohio from some Hamilton J.S. Hill, who says I have alluded to his mother in the character of Miss 'Scatcherd',--Now as I don't know who his mother was, I can't possibly say; but [as] he sends me three sheets of angry abuse I can only see that I have made some one very angry" (Chapple 465). But Gaskell's engagement and investment in a competitive Victorian literary market conveys a sense of the importance she place on the role of the reviewer in shaping public opinion. "Do you mind the law of libel?" she playfully

asked George Smith when she was in the midst of completing the book. "--I have three people I want to libel--Lady Scott (that bad woman who corrupted Branwell Brontë) Mr. Newby, & Lady Eastlake [nee Rigby]" (Chapple 418). Her rueful desire to libel Rigby demonstrates, on the one hand, a facet of the literary competition between Gaskell and her critics. But perhaps more than indicating "competitiveness," Gaskell's claim that she wanted to libel Rigby illuminates Gaskell's position in the contest over the social meaning of Brontë's femininity, pain, and genius, all three of which were mapped on to each other to produce an intelligible and recognizable picture of the woman as writer. As a self-constructed authority on Brontë's history, Gaskell could joke that Rigby's review deserved a retaliatory gesture of libel, and she could also determine what constituted Rigby's libelous statements about Brontë.

II

Gaskell's production and mediation of her subject in relation to interpretive communities which espoused competing interests serves as an example of the way in which subjectivities were formulated and historicized for the purpose of controlling the popular knowledge of what constituted such things as difference and similitude, health and sickness, masculinity and femininity. An individual's literary and sexual reputation hinges on the particular ideological and historical forces which structure the culture of representation at any given moment. Charlotte Brontë, in the space of a gendered literary field of production, had become a valuable commodity whose pain was her trademark and whom literary agents, including Gaskell herself, competed for, using different bases for their claims to authority.

James Fitzjames Stephen's 1857 review of the *Life* in the *Edinburgh Review*[9] invokes the social authority of legal discourse to condemn contemporary novelists (pejoratively labelled as "romancers") for instilling contempt for institutions in the minds of readers. Stephen, a lawyer, later a judge, and brother of Leslie Stephen, reviewed Gaskell's biography in conjunction with *Little Dorrit* and Charles Reade's *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* and claimed that all three texts encroached upon the proper jurisdiction of the law by "dragging hidden offenses to the bar of public opinion" (Easson 418). Gaskell is particularly at fault because her text pretends to be a biography, but has all the markings of a novel. Furthermore, her exposure of the hidden offenses which Brontë suffered in obscurity constitutes an attack on public decency because it offends the almost-sacred responsibility of authors to represent the best of the nation. As a "class" of writers, novelists have a particular and powerful social responsibility, one which they often shirk in favour of creating literary sensation. The "victims" of this opportunism, according to Stephen, are the public reputations of individuals who are powerless before the force of literary mythmaking. "A man's honour, a woman's virtue, are not to be blown to the winds merely because it suits the humour of a romancer to rake up some imaginary or forgotten transgression--to dress it up in the colours of fiction, heightened by the mischievous attraction of personal slander--and to set up a pillory in Paternoster Row" (Easson 415). Significantly, Stephen establishes literary criticism as the policing agent of a wayward biographical and novelistic practice which has hitherto operated with a kind of unregulated, vigilante justice regarding public figures and institutions. "The law, which might punish such

attacks, is seldom put in force against [errant novelists], and we entirely concur in the wisdom of this forbearance; but, as [the attacks] are made in the name of literature, it becomes the duty of literary criticism to expose and to disown them" (Easson 419). In the absence of the law, criticism steps in to oversee the production of literary reputations and to defend individuals from the suspicious agendas of novelists, especially those novelists who attempt to write biography.

In William Caldwell Roscoe's 1857 article in the *National Review,*[10] it is literary criticism itself which needs to be rescued from the"friends and friendly biographers [who] are apt to ask too much from 'the public,' and from the critic who expresses an individual atom of public judgment. There is such a thing as being unjust to the judges." Citing Gaskell's denunciation of the "thoughtless critics" who criticized the Brontë fiction as "morbid" or "gloomy" without knowing anything of the personal lives of the authors, Roscoe replies,

> Why thoughtless critics? They had penetration enough, it seems, to point out a leading feature in the books; and they must have been more than thoughtful to penetrate the secret domestic sorrows of the family and take them into account in characterising their written productions. A living author is known to the world by his works only, or, if not so, it is with his works alone the public are concerned; and he has no cause of complaint if he is fairly judged by them without any allowance for the private conditions under which they were produced (Easson 420).

Roscoe's and Stephen's critiques of the biography are especially interesting, not only because they are more detailed than many of the earlier reviews, but also because, written and published after the threat of a lawsuit against Gaskell's book,[11] they were concerned not only with the biography itself but with the growing public reputation of

the book and its effects on the audience. Both take up some of the legal issues which surrounded the book's reputation and use their reviews to simultaneously advance their own statements about the relationship of public opinion to the institution of literary reviewing. Stephen's review takes on issues of legality and in doing so makes an implicit statement about the gendered act of life-writing and fiction writing. Calling Gaskell a "romancer", a label she probably would have disliked,[12] Stephen re-asserts the authority of the biographical as the domain of the historian and even the legal professional, who can identify the real from the false. "Mrs. Gaskell erred, no doubt, from mistaken information and from mistaken motives; for she appears to have entirely misconceived the duties and the rights of her position as an authoress" (Easson 418). As well as making a statement about the book itself, Stephen is also making a statement about gendered literary authority, as he implies that Gaskell has gone stepped outside her proper realm of fiction-writing (equated with the taint of "romance"), a feminine domain of literary production. Finally, Stephen's review serves as a warning to readers and authors alike that literature itself--and by extension the reading public--stands to suffer from the production of texts which represent subjectivities which are not properly managed by the controlling rhetoric of criticism.

Overt references to sickness, both Brontë's and Gaskell's, surface in the early reviews of the biography with regularity. An unsigned review in the *Examiner*[13] warns its readers, "Though it proceeds from a writer very shrewd and sound of wit, yet inasmuch as it discusses sick minds almost without admitting that they are unsound, it is itself likely to be regarded by the inconsiderate as an unhealthy book" (Easson 382).

The Examiner was known for its balanced and intelligent literary reviews, and this review was likely to have stung Gaskell somewhat, as it was this same publication which had recommended *Mary Barton* to Chapman and Hall while under the editorship of John Forster and was one of the only newspapers to review *Ruth* favourably. The reviewer's reference to "sick minds" is worth noting, in that it seems to suggest that Gaskell herself and her book are in danger of being "contaminated" by the subject's sickness, in much the same way that Gaskell advances that Brontë is "infected" by her proximity to the coarseness of Yorkshire. But other reviews took up the question of Brontë's sickness with sympathy, offering evidence of a social and cultural uncertainty in the public imagination as to what constituted "sickness." "Charlotte Brontë" as she is represented in Gaskell's biography and in the periodical press, becomes the site and the occasion for competing notions of what constitutes sickness, and what constitutes genius and how the two very often come to look similar.

For some, sickness was an unmarried woman who had forfeited her claim to femininity in favour of a public, literary career. For others, sickness was the confirmation of one's endurance and commitment to a Christian vision. The *Manchester Examiner and Times*[14] responded to the charge that Brontë's mind was sick in the following way:

> if the Christian fortitude with which she strove against [her pain], and the solemn resignation which characterised her life and enabled her to bear the heaviest afflictions with exemplary patience, be considered proofs of mental sickness, we must confess our belief that the world would be none the worse for a general plague of such a malady (Easson 390).

The discourse of contagion had been a dominant one in social critique, especially in public debates about sexual promiscuity, prostitution, and the spatial arrangement of the poor and the sick within public institutions. The alignment in this particular review of "Christian fortitude" with "mental sickness" demonstrates the ways in which particular charges (in this case of sickness) could be mobilized to serve interests which appeared at the outset to be incompatible. This is contingent on the differing meanings which could be attached to "sickness" in mid-Victorian social discourse. Whatever its effects, sickness constituted one's moral and ethical state in these representations of Brontë.

Beginning with the reviews of *Jane Eyre*, and continuing through to the reaction to Gaskell's text and beyond, Brontë becomes an occasion that allows critics to give voice to competing ideologies about gender, work, sexual experience, and literary myth-making. Cultural and historical conditions give rise not to "ideology" but more precisely to literary products which often negotiate between competing ideologies which those conditions engender. The making of Brontë's literary reputation oversees the production of discourses about her which are firmly located within other competing sets of ideological discourses.

Notes

1.My discussion of cultural institutions is informed in part by Pierre Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production* in which he theorizes the relationship between individuals, institutions, and modes of production within the cultural field, and elaborates the location of the cultural field within the broader social order. Bourdieu's work considers how individuals in the cultural field are positioned by the structure of the cultural field itself, which is determined more generally by class-based power relations which cut across various fields of production.

2.The most infamous of these is Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake's 1848 review in the conservative *Quarterly Review* which suggested that Currer Bell must have led a life of sexual impropriety to have been able to create such a character as Rochester.

3.I am influenced here by Peter Brooks's work on narrative desire in "Freud's Masterplot". Brooks writes, "The beginning [of a narrative] in fact presupposes the end. The very possibility of meaning plotted through time depends on the anticipated structuring force of the ending: the indeterminable would be the meaningless. We read the incidents of narration as 'promises and annunciations' of final coherence: the metaphor reached through the chain of metonymies" (283). Although Brooks is primarily discussing fictional narratives (he refers specifically to Rousseau, Dickens, and Balzac), analogies between narrative structures in nineteenth-century biography and fiction are evident. On this point see Ira Nadel's *Victorian Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form*.

4.The model of masculine literary duty and virility was espoused primarily by Thomas Carlyle In works such as *Sartor Resartus* and *The Hero as a Man of Letters*, Carlyle constructs a masculine ideal of literary production based on the integration of mental and physical health of the writer and his sense of duty to heal an ailing nation whose literature symptomatizes its unhealthy and morbid introspection.

5.Brontë grows up in an environment which cares little for the "outside world"--she is doubly sequestered (quarantined?) in the parsonage and in Haworth itself.

6.Ira Nadel writes, "Elizabeth Gaskell wrote *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* out of friendship and caring that concealed a deeper desire to rectify the impression promoted by reviewers of Charlotte Brontë's work and life that she was a coarse and unwomanly individual" (121). This interpretation of Gaskell's motives for writing the biography is plausible but is an explanation which does not account for Gaskell's position in the Victorian field of cultural production.

7.Gaskell refers here to Elizabeth Rigby and her controversial review of *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly Review*, 1848, in which Eastlake questioned Brontë's sexual experience, declared the book "anti-Christian", and opined, "We acknowledge her firmness--we respect her determination--we feel for her struggles; but . . . the impression she leaves on our mind is that of a decidedly vulgar-minded woman--one whom we should not care for as an acquaintance, whom we should not seek as a friend, whom we should not desire for a relation, and whom we should scrupulously avoid for a governess" (Allott 110). Mary Poovey provides a thorough reading of the ideological work of Eastlake's review in *Uneven Developments*.

8.Gaskell had been deeply affected by the critical reaction to her earlier novel *Ruth* (1853). She compared herself to St. Sebastian and wrote of "'a terrible fit of crying'" when early reviews and direct communications to her condemned the novel on both

moral and artistic grounds (Easson 27).

9.*The Edinburgh Review* (1802-1900) was a barometer of Victorian public opinion throughout the century. Founded as "an instrument of political enlightenment and social reform" for an aristocratic and conservative audience, the *Edinburgh* was primarily a Whig party organ which usually adopted a tolerant, if moderate stance towards radical reform (Houghton 1: 417). Henry Reeve, who edited the journal from 1855 to 1895, described the traditionalist Whigs whom the review represented as "men of liberal but not extreme opinions, fervent in their attachment to freedom, but not less opposed to rash and violent innovation" (Houghton 1: 421); this statement describes the position of the review from its inception to its demise. Such consistency in editorial and political focus was due to a similarity in political outlook shared by each of the successive editors of the review.

10.The wide-ranging *National Review* (1855-1864) succeeded the *Prospective Review* as the primary quarterly in the nineteenth century of Unitarian opinion. The *National Review* generally avowed freedom of opinion in favour of religious orthodoxy (Easson 319). Gaskell was familiar with John James Taylor, the first editor of the *Prospective* and was also on friendly terms with many of the contributors to the *National Review*, including W.R. Greg, whose review of *Ruth* in the *National Review* (1859) created temporary discord between them.

11.Gaskell was threatened with several lawsuits over allegations that she had misrepresented people and events in the biography. The most serious of these involved Gaskell's account of Branwell Brontë's affair with a woman in whose home he was employed briefly as a tutor. Gaskell was forced to print a retraction in the *Times*, (30 May, 1857). Another dilemma Gaskell faced was the disapproval of friends of Rev. Carus Wilson, the founder of the Cowan Bridge School where the Brontë sisters attended. Gaskell's representation and judgment of the mistreatment the Brontë's received at the hands of Wilson was vehemently opposed.

12.Here I would concur again with D'Albertis who claims that Gaskell asserted both her feminine and her literary authority over Brontë by identifying Brontë herself as Romantic, in contrast to Gaskell's own pragmatism and responsiveness to the social.

13.*The Examiner* (1808-1881) was founded by Leigh and John Hunt. Although they conceived of the review as an instrument of radical thought, the tone and tenor of the *Examiner* gradually moved to a more liberal position under the editorial direction of Albany Fonblanque (1830-1847). See Easson, 67.

14.*The Manchester Examiner and Times* (1846-95) was founded in the interest of support for Free Trade.

THREE

Incessant Education: John Stuart Mill

The history of the reception of John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, published posthumously in 1873, opens a window onto the prevailing attitudes in Victorian culture about such things as the duty of the public intellectual in British society and the perceived impropriety of literary and sexual companionship between men and women. I argue that the history of the construction of Mill as a public figure in the periodical press is of especial importance, given that Mill was intimately involved with the *Westminster Review* from an early age, was a prominent contributor to periodical literature throughout most of his writing career, and had much to say about the role of the press in reflecting and creating public opinion in mid-Victorian culture. But what concerns me more in this chapter is the way in which the reviews respond and contribute to the construction of Mill as a public figure whose public career metonymically signifies his life, and whose education, begun at the age of three, was "incessantly" enforced and pursued until his death. Mill's *Autobiography*, and Victorian responses to it, offer important insights into the location of the Victorian subject vis-a-vis the apparatus of Victorian educational institutions which were being reworked in actual practice and in the public imagination as sites for the formation of an industrialized British citizenry. Within that reworking, questions about how to categorize the "exceptional individual"--referred to as the genius, the strong-minded woman--arose alongside the homogenization and aggregation of various symbolic and material institutional practices and discourses which sought to level difference in the

interests of forming a "social body" which could be quantified and classified.[1] That is, questions about what constituted the difference of the individual of genius, and how to manage and make sense of that difference, were asked in the context of the practical and theoretical transformation of the notion of the educational institution as a site of knowledge production and subject formation. In what follows, I trace the ways in which James Mill's system of education was shown in the reviews to be cruel, unnatural and dangerous, largely because it was private and unchecked by systems of surveillance and control meant to monitor the social and psychological development of the child. John Stuart Mill's peculiar form of genius could never be fully legitimated, because it was seen to be the result of James Mill's harsh and abnormal pedagogical method which produced a mind susceptible in later life to "extravagant delusion" and feminine sentiment (Hayward 672).

In this chapter I examine Mill's construction of himself in the *Autobiography* as simultaneously a pupil and an instructor, and then go on to explore the ways in which the reviews responded to that construction, particularly as it provided a discursive space for reviewers to advance their own claims about the role of the man of letters as public intellectual in Victorian culture. I describe how the press constructed Mill's sexuality as ambivalent and underdeveloped, and how that construction became linked to the perception that Mill was an ineffectual intellectual whose theoretical prescriptions for a liberal society were untenable, and whose critical descriptions of English society were seen as the result of his "unnatural" and sequestered childhood and adult education, an education which permanently warped his ability to relate to the

public about which he theorized. Finally, Mill's literary and sexual relationship with Harriet Taylor will be examined in the context of the Victorian media's attempt to explain Mill's singular genius to a public still largely uneasy about the role of women as speaking and writing voices in the public sphere.[2] In order to explain the general reaction to Mill's Life in the Victorian press, I will first examine the ways in which Mill presents his "mental history" and his father's role in authoring it.

I

In 1806, seven weeks after his son John was born, James Mill wrote a letter to William Forbes, a relative of Mill's Scottish patron, and declared, "I intend to run a fair race with you in the education of a son. Let us have a well-disputed trial which of us twenty years hence can exhibit the most accomplished & virtuous young man . . . I have a strong determination at present to exert myself to the utmost to see what the power of education can do" (qtd. in Stillinger 23). Thus John Stuart Mill began learning Greek at the age of three, Latin at age eight, and by the age of twelve had studied geometry, algebra, and calculus and had read all of Plato's dialogues, the Greek poets, and major British and European histories. His "private reading" included Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden. At twelve Mill's father began teaching him formal logic and by the age of fourteen, Mill writes, his formal studies with his father ended. In 1820 Mill was sent to France for a year to live with the Benthams and to study French and natural sciences. When he returned to England "though my studies went on under my father's general direction, he was no longer my schoolmaster" (44).

Even a cursory perusal of the major reviews of the *Autobiography* reveals a

preoccupation with the effects of the "educational experiment" James Mill performed, using his children as subjects.[3] Many of the reviews either condemn James Mill or vindicate him from the charge that he was a cruel and unloving father who used his children to prove his own theories about education and the mental development of individuals; what emerges from the reviewers' emphasis on the "mental progress" of John Stuart Mill as it was guided by his father is a representation of Mill as brilliant yet misguided, vigourously masculine, yet woefully effeminate, stern yet impressionable, and easily swayed by the dictates of his mentors.[4]

Mill's motivations for writing his autobiography, outlined at the very beginning of the text, are derived from a belief that a record of his education might be "useful" for readers as they grapple with prevailing questions about education. The period between 1850 and 1870 saw the development of a national, standardized system of education for boys and girls of all classes in Britain, although education for middle class girls remained largely unsystematized for most of the century. The Schools Inquiry Commission, also known as the Taunton Commission was established in 1864. Its reports led to the standardization of curriculum and teacher training. At the same time, the establishment of colleges for women and the working classes and women's admission to Oxford and Cambridge local examinations were changing the face of higher education and adult professional training. In 1870, three years before Mill's *Autobiography* was published ,The Education Act passed in the House of Commons and was seen as the culmination of a decades-long campaign towards a national public education system.[5]

Writing of the transformations in nineteenth-century education in *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*, Raymond Williams outlines three dominant strands of argument which contributed to the formation of universal schooling in the nineteenth century: the growth of democracy, "'moral rescue'" of the working classes, and colonial and industrial expansion. Bound up with these arguments was a clear distinction between a liberal humanist education and technical training and instruction, and the question of "appropriate" models for different social classes was frequently debated. Those who opposed the democratization of education believed "liberal education would be vulgarized by extension to the 'masses' [or] would be destroyed by being turned into a system of specialized and technical training" (Williams, *Revolution*, 142).[6] Practical and ideological transformations to education in Britain provided a social and institutional context, both for Mill and his critics, from which to examine Mill's own experience. To a Victorian reader aware of issues in education throughout the 1860s and 70s, the isolation of Mill's private education must have stood in stark contrast to the trend of democratization, regulation, and surveillance that the development of public education galvanized. Later in this chapter, I read the reviews of Mill's text in relation to this contrast.

Besides an acknowledgement that the reading public may be interested in an account of Mill's education in the context of the transformation of the apparatus of education, Mill also writes that the record of the stages of the mental development of an individual might be of interest to the general public, but finally states, "a motive which weighs more with me than either of these, is a desire to make acknowledgment

of the debts which my intellectual and moral development owes to other persons; some of them of recognized eminence, others less known than they deserve to be, and the one to whom most of all is due, one whom the world had no opportunity of knowing" (25-26).[7] Mill privileges his mental development as the central feature of his subjectivity, and documents its growth in stages which structure the division of his text into chapters with such titles as: Childhood, and Early Education; Last Stage of Education, and First of Self-Education; A Crisis in My Mental History. One Stage Onward. Although Mill ostensibly occupies the centre of his own text, his emphasis on the educational influence of others at the outset of the *Autobiography* and throughout the text allows Mill to locate himself alongside those figures in his text whom he credits as his mentors--chief among them his father and Harriet Taylor. The result of this positioning on the part of Mill, particularly in the first chapter of the book, is that he is able to monitor his own progress from the perspective of the instructor: that is, Mill assesses himself as if he is his own mentor. Mill as a young student becomes a third person in the adult Mill's representation of his father's instruction; writing as an adult, Mill comments on the pedagogical methods and the texts that turned out to be "successful" or "useful" to his mental maturation. For example, at eight years of age, his father had Mill teaching Latin to a younger sister and as the Mill family grew, Mill took on increased teaching responsibilities for his siblings, a task he did not particularly enjoy but one which, as Regenia Gagnier observes, involved him "within a chain of transmitted knowledge" (250). Of the experience Mill writes,

> I . . . derived from this discipline the great advantage of learning more

> thoroughly and retaining more lastingly the things which I was set to teach: perhaps, too, the practice it afforded in explaining difficulties to others, may even at that age have been useful. In other respects, the experience of my boyhood is not favorable to the plan of teaching children by means of one another, and I well know that the relation between teacher and taught is not a good moral discipline to either (31).

Here Mill is able to weigh the success of his father's plan by observing its ultimate advantages and disadvantages. With his eight-year old self as the subject of his father's educational methods and of Mill's memoir, the adult Mill places himself in the position of pedagogue over his young self--this also allows him the opportunity to criticize his father's educational project from the perspective of a colleague, rather than from the perspective of a pupil. Such a rhetorical move allows Mill to establish an equality with his father in the *Autobiography* that he could not have experienced under his father's strict guidance.

Mill's construction of his identity must be understood in the context of the genre of Victorian autobiography and its attendant reading practices, which drew little distinction between the discursive identity presented in the text, and the concrete situations outside the text which conventional literary forms and figures transformed and adapted (Gagnier 7). The eminence of the subject confirmed before the biography or autobiography was composed, the act of reading constituted either a confirmation of established rumour, as in the case of Mill's *Autobiography* or a discovery of previously-unknown facts, as the reaction to *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* attests.[8] As I suggested in Chapter One, Victorian readers did not typically regard Victorian life-writing as a form of writing which challenged and contested notions of identity and

subjective experience. Rather, the institutional and symbolic value of biography and autobiography in the period lay in its representation of a stable, coherent form of psychological realism from which a "mass readership" was seen to draw both its inspiration and its sense of itself as a homogenous social body in contrast to the difference of the literary genius. I am drawing attention here to the difference between Mill's identity outside the text and its manifestation in the *Autobiography* according to the generic determinations and popular expectations of dominant modes of self-representation in the nineteenth century. As Gagnier writes, "All writing about one's self, whether called autobiography, memoir, confession, or (as I call it) rhetorical projects embedded in concrete material situations, [is] within the category of texts of the imagination" (7). The truth of the subject could be represented discursively, and indeed, Victorian reading practices relied on life writing to provide them with the facts of an eminent life for the purpose of documenting "the spirit of the age." Mill's awareness of his self as a construct, and especially his recognition that his self is a product of his father's direct influence, needs to be distinguished from his awareness of his identity as a literary and imaginative formulation guided by generic conventions of Victorian autobiography which presupposed such things as mental and moral progression, the single originary moment, and the continuity and coherence of the subject.

In an essay which considers Mill's representation of himself in the *Autobiography* as self-consciously a product of his father's intellectual, rather than sexual desire, Linda Zerilli reads Mill's Life in the context of the Oedipal narrative of

competition and identification with the father at the expense of the mother. She invokes Freudian conceptions of the work of memory and writes: "rememoration is a process in which the past is not so much recollected as it is worked over--a process in which the 'I' of childhood, for example, constitutes and is constituted in relation to the 'I' of the locutor" (198). Zirelli's consideration of the relationality and contingency of the "I" in autobiographical writing suggests that the subject of the text is always divided, multiple, and contradicted. Her emphasis on "Mill's explicit claim to androgyny" and on "'Harriet Taylor' [as] a self-constituting trope in Mill's written self" (193) carves a space from which I depart. While I agree that Mill's "I" must be read relationally as a textual construct which is "formed in relation to the psychic needs of the present",--that is, Mill's needs at the time of writing the *Autobiography*--I also read Mill's "I" as a *social* construct which is formed in relation to the needs and anticipations of a readership who is able identify with a subject according to shared expectations based on generic models of intelligibility. Rather than reading Mill as self-consciously aware of himself as a divided subject, able to occupy and embody several subjectivities and reproduce them in his autobiography, I understand Mill's construction of himself as a consistent subject who fits a certain coherent and hierarchical model of mental development--one with which Victorian readers and reviewers identified. This model affords him the advantage of an adult, developed perspective from which to critique his own intellectual formation and his father's role in guiding it. For example, reviewing his father's rather unsuccessful attempts to instruct Mill in the art of locution, Mill observes, "A defect running through his otherwise admirable modes of instruction, as it

did through all his modes of thought, was that of trusting too much to the intelligibleness of the abstract, when not embodied in the concrete. It was at a much later period of my youth, when practicing elocution by myself, or with companions of my own age, that I for the first time understood the object of his rules, and saw the psychological grounds for them" (40). If Mill embodies both teacher and pupil at the same moment in his text, it does not seem to pose a serious dilemma to Mill's self-representation, but is rather figured as the natural outcome of his father's system of education, which ensured that Mill would pass through various stages of mental development until he was able to reflect on his own progress. Mill simultaneously inhabits two different moments in a coherent narrative in which one position--that of the pupil--has the potential to evolve into the position of the master.

Mill's criticisms throughout the *Autobiography* of his father's severity and ill-temper serve as the most important opportunities for him to establish his own adult subjectivity, the "I" of the *Autobiography*, which eventually becomes a "we" with the introduction of Harriet Taylor to the text. Without wanting to make the narrow suggestion that Mill's Life serves the therapeutic purpose of venting his suppressed anger and hostility to his father, as some critics have done, I do suggest that the effect of Mill's criticism of his father is to create a tone of knowing authority from which to discern and critique the mistakes of the teacher, and to ultimately supplant his father's former control over his mental and spiritual direction. The adult "I" in Mill's text, then, is constructed in relation and in response to the childhood "I" which Mill represents as privatized and sequestered from everyone but his father:

> He completely succeeded in preserving me from the sort of influences he so much dreaded. I was not at all aware that my attainments were anything unusual at my age. . . . I neither estimated myself highly nor lowly: I did not estimate myself at all. If I thought anything about myself, it was that I was rather backward in my studies, since I always found myself so, in comparison with what my father expected from me (46).

Mill represents his father, or more precisely his father's expectations, as the only childhood reference point from which to estimate himself. Mill recounts a particular incident in which his father "expressed some displeasure at my ineffectual effort to define the word idea" (45). Signification is described here as a private matter between father and son, instructor and pupil, which a third person, the mature Mill, looks upon. Mill's adult perspective on these "terrifying episodes in accountability in which the full meaning of texts and language is the province of the father" (Zerilli 199), opens up to critique the private exchange of meaning between two individuals, one of whom is Mill's young self. The gradual broadening of Mill's sphere of influence is one of the "motors" of the *Autobiography* and the transition from an "I" to a "we" as the subject of experience contributes to the text's drive away from the private towards the social. But how is "the social" represented? As I discuss below, the logic of the text, which moves from the single to the social, contradicts Mill's aversion to "society."

Mill's mental crisis in his early twenties has often been cited as the moment at which he finally broke from many of his father's expectations, but Mill's *Autobiography* suggests that even from a young age, Mill felt his own difference from his father, even as he fully identified himself as his father's pupil:

> Whatever I knew more than others, could not be ascribed to any merit

> in me, but to the very unusual advantage which had fallen to my lot, of having a father who was able to teach me, and willing to give the necessary trouble and time; that it was no matter of praise to me, if I knew more than those who had not had a similar advantage, but the deepest disgrace to me if I did not (46).

There are a number of interesting things about this passage. It suggests, first of all, Mill's awareness of the constructedness of intellectual ability out of the combination of learned behaviour and socio-economic advantage. But it also locates the explanation for Mill's mental development thoroughly within his father's influence, rather than in any wider community of knowledge--Mill's genius is a social construct only insofar as it is the product of his father's desire. Although the passage has been read as evidence that Mill's desires were inseparable from his father's (Gagnier), the fear of difference through intellectual failure also underlies the passage.

Mill's education is private in nearly every sense of the word; his abilities may be learned, but only in the sense that they are passed down from a single individual, rather than gathered through observation and interaction with a wide and varied social group. Mill writes that his recollection of his difference in relation to other boys his age would have been impossible had his father not kept him isolated from his peers. "He was earnestly bent upon my escaping not only the ordinary corrupting influence which boys exercise over boys, but the contagion of vulgar modes of thought and feeling . . . " (47). Homosociality is represented here as vulgar, corrupting, and diseased, and Mill carried this attitude towards English social life throughout much of the rest of his life, preferring the company of a small and like-minded social circle to a broad one. Although Mill eventually identifies influences other than his father's--chief

among them the Bentham family, John and Charles Austin, David Ricardo, and John Sterling--there is a sense throughout the text that these relationships are cultivated for the purpose of mental growth and political affirmation rather than camaraderie: "Maurice and Sterling were of considerable use to my development" (125). Even when something resembling affection and sentiment is introduced to the text, it is made possible or desirable largely through a similarity of political belief and/or philosophical attitude between two individuals:

> With Sterling I soon became very intimate, and was more attached to him than I have ever been to any other man . . . a generous and ardent nature which threw itself with impetuosity into the opinions it adopted, but was as eager to do justice to the doctrines and men it was opposed to, as to make war on what it thought their errors; and an equal devotion to the two cardinal points of Liberty and Duty, formed a combination of qualities as attractive to me, as to all others who knew him as well as I did (125).

The purpose of Mill's relationships is clearly defined: those individuals who mirror Mill's own beliefs back to him, or "improve" his position by providing an instructive contrast, are desired. Later in the text Mill writes, "on the few cardinal points of human opinion, agreement of conviction and feeling on these, has been felt in all times to be an essential requisite of anything worthy the name of friendship" (174). Furthermore, the cultivation of relationships outside his father's influence does not diminish his father's authority, but re-shapes whatever his father has imparted to him--no serious break with his father is ever established, only an expansion and modification of James Mill's theoretical and practical instruction is suggested through his accounts of his relationship with others. The widening and socializing of Mill's influences to

include men other than his father, however, narrows again with the explicit introduction of Harriet Taylor into the text.

Mill wrote his *Autobiography* long after he began his literary collaboration with Harriet Taylor whom he credits in his text as his true intellectual and spiritual mentor. Mill met Taylor in 1830 when he was in his twenties and developed an intense emotional and literary relationship with her which they did not hide from John Taylor, Harriet's husband or from the public. Together they wrote *On Liberty* (1859) and *The Subjection of Women* (1861), and Taylor contributed to Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) which he had begun before meeting her. Mill and Taylor co-authored the final version of Mill's Life together, adding and deleting entire passages from Mill's early manuscript.[9] During the course of their twenty year friendship, Taylor obtained a trial separation from her husband and invited Mill regularly to her home. They married in 1851, two years after John Taylor's death. There are a number of important issues surrounding Taylor's sexual and literary reputation in relation to Mill's which I discuss below when I describe the critical reaction to Mill's Life, chief among them the implication that Taylor's thought tainted Mill's. For now, I want to trace the way in which Mill constructs Taylor's influence in his *Autobiography* as both a continuation and a substitution of his father's.

"In this third period (as it may be termed) of my mental progress, which now went hand in hand with hers, my opinions gained equally in breadth and depth. I understood more things, and those which I had understood before, I now understood more thoroughly" (Mill 174). Prepared for Taylor's "genius" by his "willingness and

ability to learn from everybody", Mill admits, "the greatest part of my mental growth consisted in the assimilation of [her] truths, and the most valuable part of my intellectual work was in building the bridges and clearing the paths which connected them with my general system of thought" (185). On the other hand, Taylor's "practical turn of mind . . . repressed in me all tendencies that were really visionary. Her mind invested all ideas in a concrete shape, and formed to itself a conception of how they would actually work" (188). The picture that emerges of Mill's and Taylor's literary and intellectual relationship in the *Autobiography* is one of a marriage of theory with practice. Taylor's power over Mill's thought and his writing is great, but it is not figured as an influence which revolutionizes Mill's opinion, but one which compliments and continues the work his father and other figures had already begun in cultivating Mill's mental habits.

Taylor's influence displaces James Mill's thought not at its theoretical origins but at its practical ends. Harriet Taylor represents the culmination and resolution within Mill's narrative of his own progress, or as Linda Zerilli argues, "a self-constituting trope in Mill's written self; a trope deployed in Mill's effort to master his own (personal and intellectual) genealogy" (193). Without wanting to suggest that his father's thought and instruction has become obsolete to his own opinion, Mill manages Taylor's authority with his father's in his text by suggesting that Taylor insists on the social use value of Mill's writing, but that without his father's system of education, he would be powerless to receive her genius. Mill's control over the narration of his past depends less on a rejection and resistance to his father's authority, than on an

assimilation and mediation of competing influences.

> With those who, like all the best and wisest of mankind, are dissatisfied with human life as it is, and whose feelings are wholly identified with its radical amendment, there are two main regions of thought. One is the region of ultimate aims; the constituent element of the highest realizable ideal of human life. The other is that of the immediately useful and practically attainable. In both these departments I have acquired more from her teaching, than from all other sources taken together. And, to say truth, it is in these two extremes principally, that real certainty lies. My own strength lay wholly in the uncertain and slippery intermediate region, that of theory, or moral and political science . . . I have often received praise, which in my own right I only partially deserve, for the greater practicality which is supposed to be found in my writings, compared with those of most thinkers who have been equally addicted to large generalizations. The writings in which this quality has been observed, were not the work of one mind, but of the fusion of two, one of them as preeminently practical in its judgments and perceptions of things present, as it was high and bold in its anticipations for a remote futurity (148-149).

In my reading of Mill's Life, the preceding quotation best illustrates Mill's attempt to negotiate and represent both his father's and his wife's role in making and remaking Mill's identity, even though his father is not named. Indeed, explicit references to James Mill disappear from the text at a certain point; the chapter divisions in the *Autobiography* contain and demarcate specific influences from each other, as if to suggest that where one mentor departs from the text, (as opposed to Mill's identity outside the text) another begins, with little cross-over between them. The sixth chapter, entitled "Commencement of the Most Valuable Friendship of My Life. My Father's Death" conveys the sense that a relationship with Taylor entails the symbolic and mortal death of James Mill. In summarizing his father's authority in this chapter, Mill writes, "In the power of influencing by mere force of mind and character, the

convictions and purposes of others, and in the strenuous exertion of that power to promote freedom and progress, he left, as far as my knowledge extends, no equal among men, but one among women" (159). The remainder of the *Autobiography* is in part a record of Mill's negotiation of these two equals as the forces which shape his effectiveness as a public voice.

With his father operating as the progenitor of Mill's intellectual and mental capacity, his influence pervades the text, even though it is not named in the second half of the volume. What is named, however, is Mill's self-perceived lack of ability to comprehend the practical application of his work, and this lack he attributes to his father's method of instruction. At the very end of the first chapter of the *Autobiography*, Mill reflects that his father's system of education "was in itself much more fitted for training me to *know* than to *do* . . . while he saved me from the demoralizing effects of school life, he made no effort to provide me with any sufficient substitute for its practicalizing influences" (48). Taylor becomes the substitute who imparts to Mill the practical application of knowledge. Mill positions himself in the "uncertain and slippery intermediate region" between the regions occupied by his two dominant mentors. Although he claims Taylor as his greatest influence, his insistence that he merely mediates and interprets her genius from the context of his own theoretical and scientific training, allows him to account for his father's prior hold over the development of his mental progress. Mill's insistence that his work is "fusion of two minds" blurs the difference between his father's, Taylor's, and his own thought. Readers and critics of Mill's *Autobiography* set for themselves the task of defining and

demarcating exactly where the particular authorities of Taylor and James Mill lay, both in his John Stuart Mill's writing and in the formation of his identity.

II

Questions and anxieties about the relationship between the individual, isolated genius and the man of duty in the public sphere characterize much of the critical reaction to the *Autobiography*. I have been explaining the way in which Mill describes himself in relation to his father's and his wife's influence in order to sketch out what I see as some of the main points of tension in the *Autobiography* which provided reviewers the opportunity to make sense of Mill's contribution to Victorian intellectual and political life. In what follows, I isolate what I see as some of the main interpretive threads binding a variety of the reviews together. I trace these threads within the fabric of Victorian social and political thought, while trying to account for some of the differences between the reviews represented by the competing political biases of the various publications.

As I suggested in Chapter One, the political and literary identities of particular periodicals determined the ways in which the sexual and literary reputations of particular figures were constructed. When interpreting contemporaneous reviews of a particular text, the temptation is often to read them as indicative of the identity of the particular reviewer, rather than of the audience they addressed. I try to read each of the reviews discussed below in the context of the literary-critical institution of reviewing for the periodical press. I identify the overt political biases of each of the periodicals in which the reviews appeared and I read their construction of Mill, and the social and

political concerns which underlie their critique of him, in light of their political influences.

Many reviewers in the Victorian press identified an "imbalance" in John Stuart Mill's thought and writing which they attributed to an unequal distribution of reason and sentiment. Mill was identified as the victim of a heartless pedagogical experiment which robbed him of the "latent gifts of imagination and sensibility which would have made him a better and a happier man if he had not been crushed by a cruel education, a false philosophy, and an evil fate" (Reeve 129). Cut off from the softening effects of art and poetry in his early education, and robbed of any exposure to a Christian moral instruction at the hands of his father's Utilitarianism, (both of which would have provided him with the necessary balance between mind and heart in his early youth), Mill was made all the more vulnerable to Taylor's "sentimental socialism" when he met her in his early twenties. According to the reviewer for the *Quarterly* "the union between sentiment and reason in his nature remained to the end mechanical. This we regard as the true key to his life. If he was too finely organized, too fearless and honest, to allow the head and heart consciously to contradict each other, their conclusions were sometimes not homogenous; the framework is austere and logicall, the contents are heated and sentimental" (Palgrave 156).[10] The review in *Fraser's* made a similar observation: "Unluckily he did not maintain the due balance [between reason and sentiment]. He ran off into the opposite extreme, and suffered feeling to overcome judgment to an extent almost unparalleled in the history of mind; at least of a mind like his" (Hayward 672).[11] In both of these examples, Mill is presented as a

figure caught somewhere in the middle of two powerful epistemologies. Unable to negotiate an equilibrium for himself, Mill "runs off into extremes", displaying an unmanly excessiveness of sentiment in later life. Both the origin and the result of the imbalance in Mill's thought is located in a strongly gendered notion of Mill's assimilation and acceptance of competing ideas and paradigms, which is both praised and deplored by the Victorian media.

"His impressionableness was of the valuable positive kind, which adds and assimilates new elements from many quarters, without disturbing the organic structure of the whole" (Morley 2).[12] Unlike other men, who "flit aimlessly from doctrine to doctrine as the flies of a summer day dart from point to point in the vacuous air" Mill's "receptivity" was a sign of his duty, truth, consistency, and social responsibility (2), and was, in the same review, placed against his father's perceived rigidity, creating a notion of competing models of masculinity embodied in the father and the son.

> In stoical tenacity of character, as well as in intellectual originality and concentrated force of understanding, some of those who knew both tell us that Mr. Mill was inferior to his father. But who does not feel in the son the serious charm of a power of adaptation and pliableness which we can never associate with the hardy and more rigorous nature of the other? (2)

I will discuss the notion of these competing masculinities below when I trace the way in which Taylor is seen as a feminizing influence on Mill's opinion. At the moment, I want to follow up the positive interpretation of Mill's intellectual pliancy contained in the *Fortnightly*, with reviews which saw Mill's receptivity as a permanent and damaging mark of his inability to appeal to a wide audience. The explanation for Mill's

accommodation of competing opinions is his experience of growing up under the influence of the Utilitarian philosophy and its relatively small group of exponents.

The "bilious exclusiveness" and "vitiated air" of the Utilitarian coterie is faulted for producing an unnatural genius who was "not really sitting 'on a hill retired,' or 'mount of speculation' whence [he] could 'survey mankind' with dispassionate and philosophical cleverness, but only moving in a very narrow world of [his] own" (Palgrave 165-66). In the final chapter of the *Autobiography*, entitled, "The Remainder of My Life", Mill disparages English society for its superficiality, complaining that no "serious discussion" occurs in public life, and that no witty repartee occurs as it does in French society, owing to "the national deficiency in liveliness and sociability." The lack of intellectual stimulation to be found in general society, Mill writes, will only damage the intellectual should he choose to enter it: "Persons even of intellectual aspirations had much better, if they can, make their habitual associates of at least their equals, and as far as possible, their superiors . . . All these circumstances united, made the number very small of those whose society, and still more whose intimacy, I voluntarily sought" (173-4). Mill believed that the public intellectual, by going into society, would only compromise his or her mental rigour and higher principles in the face of a public unable to comprehend the import of his or her theories. Reviewers who were hostile to Mill pounced on this section of the *Autobiography*, claiming that Mill and his circle had never been *in* society to begin with, and were therefore ill-equipped to judge it for its alleged lack of intellectual and social stimulation. Reviewers for the *Westminster* and the *Fortnightly* defended Mill's attack of public social life,[13] saying

that Mill "did not retire to gratify any self-indulgent whim, but only in order to work the more uninterruptedly and definitely. The Autobiography tells us what pains he took to keep himself informed of all that was going on in every part of the world" (20).[14] Other reviewers complained that while Mill may have had a broad knowledge of "all that was going on in every part of the world", he lacked what was needed to put his knowledge and his theories into action. The cultural and political authority of Benthamism can be pointed to here as one way to read the notion of Mill's ineffectiveness as a public intellectual.

The *Edinburgh Review*[15] describes the failure of Benthamism (and Utilitarian philosophy generally) in the language of social evolution and obsolescence; unfit to survive against competing theories of social regeneration and renewal within Victorian mercantile capitalism, "Benthamites" are akin to an extinct species: "No such being as a Benthamite of the second generation is known to exist, and even the survivors of the original sect no longer belong to it." Only James Mill survives as a curious throwback, "denouncing with savage vehemence the deserters from his standard" (117). The price of the Utilitarian mistake--its misguided philosophies and its attendant "coterie" behaviour--is paid by its most famous victim, John Stuart Mill, whose psychological and moral progress is damaged from the very beginning:

> These were the men who had started in life with a theory, which was to rally to it all educated minds and regenerate the world. Fifty years have passed , and where is their theory now? It did not last them half their own lives. John Mill himself had slipped out of the pale. . . . Had [he] followed the free and uncontrolled bent of his philosophical growth from this point in his life, or had he fallen into hands other than those which subsequently enchained him, we think that he might have arrived

> at far higher and more sound results in moral and metaphysical science than he ever attained to. For it may here be remarked, that one of the distinctive peculiarities of John Mill was what, for want of a simpler term, we must call his *receptivity* (117).

Mill's influence and training fits him to receive rather than to transmit. Without naming it specifically, the review presents Mill as too much a *student* of the prevailing and competing opinion of his day, rather than a *master*. Unlike the *Fortnightly* review, which interprets Mill's receptivity as a mark of his ability to assimilate, and therefore survive and adapt to a dynamic social and political climate, the *Edinburgh* defines Mill's main "failing" as the overly sympathetic and impressionable disposition which unfits Mill for the manly, vigorous discourse of political economy. Furthermore, the "danger" posed by the exclusiveness of a coterie of intellectuals was analogous to the elitism of the aristocracy which was increasingly characterized as a feminized and weakened arm of the social body throughout the Victorian period. A widespread perception of the aristocracy as a degenerate and incestuous class cut off from the healthy, vigourous "real world" of an increasingly powerful middle class was mapped on to the suspicion of the intellectual coterie as a degenerate social and symbolic arrangement.

Mill is thus systematically feminized by reviewers. His literary and intellectual potency is mapped on to his gendered and sexual identity and the trope of receptivity, common to many of the reviews, does the ideological work of explaining Mill's difference and pronouncing his theories as untenable because ultimately unmanly. His relationship with Taylor furthers the notion that Mill embodies the "feminine principle"

of the one who receives, while Taylor is figured as the aggressive, masculinized colonizer of Mill's early thought. Mill's literary collaboration with Taylor--*l'egoisme a deux*--guarantees and accounts for the general perception that "if the whole work of his life be examined, it will be found to be eminently destructive but not to contain one practical constructive idea" (Reeve 128). The writing Mill describes as a joint production in the *Autobiography* between himself and Taylor is described as untenable and unhealthy because it is cut off from the "real world" of social relations and because it is suffused with unmanly "passion", "romance", and "emotion" that reside uneasily in the public sphere of male intellectual disinterestedness, restraint, and objectivity.

> After a brief struggle the feminine influence overcame the masculine; and the heels of the 'reasoning machine,' as he calls himself at one period, revolved at the bidding of the sentimental socialist. But the harder and softer elements of his character never blended; they rose to the surface alternately; and hence much of the subsequent incoherence of his opinions and his life (Morley 673).

The relationship between "the masculine" and "the feminine" is produced as a site of battle, and once again, Mill's identity is positioned, uneasily, between two opposed and powerful influences. The implication, as I read it, is that if Mill is unable to negotiate the development of his own precarious sexual and gendered identity, he is then automatically unqualified to make judgments of an English society which had become increasingly reliant on stable notions of male and female identity as organizing categories of social and psychological behaviour. In this way, notions of both the sexual and the literary/intellectual become inextricably linked, offering insights into the production of the reputation of public figures, and what kinds of discourses and

ideologies those reputations were made of.

"There is no guide to a man more dangerous than a woman, to whom he is fondly attached, and who has cast off the restraints of social, if not moral, obligation. Her mind is in a state of revolt against all received opinions; she seeks to bend all truths and principles to cover her own obliquities; and she fancies that all the rest of mankind are in a conspiracy of hypocrisy and prejudice against her" (Reeve 122). Reactions against Mill's thought which overtly question his masculinity can be read as part of a growing anti-feminist backlash in the Victorian period. With Mill as one of the strongest feminist voices in the mid-Victorian period, his *Autobiography* could effectively be used as an opportunity to express political and social trepidation towards feminist and women's voices in public dialogue. For as Elaine Showalter writes in *Sexual Anarchy*, "Men, too, faced changes in their lives and sexual identities" with the increasing prominence of feminist activity and feminist perspectives on sex and gender relations. "The crisis of masculinity marked an awakening consciousness of what it meant to be a man . . . Opposition to the women's movement in an attempt to preserve traditional definitions of sex roles was an obvious reaction" (9). One of the most powerful ways to oppose the women's movement was to question the reason of the man who "expressed sympathy" for women's right to participate in public activity and policy-making. The *Quarterly Review* located the origin of Mill's failings as a public man of duty, as the *Edinburgh Review* did, in his father's system of education, which, the reviewer stated, permanently warped the necessary balance a man needed between sentiment and reason. "The heaviest criticism which we have to make against Mill's

early education is, that it was too successful. Whether he was correct in having 'always a humble opinion of my own powers as an original thinker' , or whether originality may have been stifled by his training, it is remarkable how closely his aims and opinions, to the end, kept the forms of the mould into which (as we have observed) his youth was poured by his father" (155).

If part of James Mill's project in educating his son could be shown to be the overt repression of what was deemed the female, the social, and the sentimental, then, according to a narrative of normative linear sexual development, it could then also be proved that John Mill was not fully formed, either as a man or as an adult. The contradiction the various reviews demonstrate is that the inculcation of "the feminine" was both necessary and dangerous to the natural development of a man's sexual, gendered, and eventually intellectual identity. This contradictory notion turned on a version of sexual "progress" which required both balance between the "opposed" sexes and the introduction and cultivation of certain overdetermined gender "traits" at specific moments of identity and subject formation. Since boys and girls received much the same kind of nursery training, it was assumed that sexual and gender difference was something an individual "grew into", necessitating different, gender and sex-specific forms of education. "Boys and girls, old men and women, were much the same, but men and women in the prime of life differed both in physical and mental characteristics" (Burstyn 89). Mill's femininity in later life could be figured as an excessive, compensatory desire to fill the lack created by his father's pedagogical failings. At the same time, it could also be shown that James Mill had cultivated an

adult child who was just beginning to experience "youth", "femininity", "sentimentality" under the influence of a new "master"--Taylor. "We know now that he never had anything youthful about him at any time--except perhaps when, in an epicene fashion, he fell in love--and the worst and most mischievous of his errors were the last" (Morley 681). Mill was altogether "degenerate" in his development, and although none of the reviews explicitly mention it, the fact that Mill never had children of his own would likely have contributed to the notion that Mill's sexuality was somehow damaged, or more specifically that Mill, a child himself who had spent undue mental energy too early at too early a biological age, was unable to participate in the reproduction of the species. His only "output" was his writing, and in the eyes of many reviewers, they were seen as diseased texts which issued from an unhealthy mind.

"Sexual difference thus seems to be already present in how we constitute meaning; it is already part of the logic that drives writing. . . . Not only do attitudes toward sexual difference 'generate and structure literary texts'; texts generate sexual difference" (Laqueur 17). The tension and incoherence in Mill's sexual and literary identity Victorian reviewers detected rested partly upon what Thomas Laqueur defines in *Making Sex* as the two-sex model of sexual identity formation. With the post-Enlightenment "discovery" of sexual difference between men and women, sexed bodies came to signify an array of moral, psychological, and mental differences which were assigned to gender difference. By the early nineteenth century, the female body was no longer considered to be an inferior version of the male body on a vertical and hierarchic scale, but an entirely different and actually "opposed" body. "A biology of

cosmic hierarchy gave way to a biology of incommensurability, anchored in the body, in which the relationship of men to women was not given as one of equality or inequality but rather of difference. This required interpretation and became the weapon of cultural and political struggle" (Laqueur 207). Part of Laqueur's point is that sexual difference came to be used in a variety of political arenas; concepts of sexual difference and coherence were deployed in the construction of Mill's sexual and literary reputation which were also found in parallel discourses of, for instance, educational reform.

Particularly since so much of Mill's self-presentation and posthumous reputation was centred on the education to which he had been subjected, attention to the Victorian "education question" seems necessary. By the 1870s, medical studies of sexual/mental difference between men and women were being used by educational reformers to prescribe and formulate curricula for girls and boys, and to prohibit women from obtaining university degrees. Two of the most famous studies on education and sex, Edward H. Clarke's *Sex in Education* (1873) and Henry Maudsley's "Sex in Mind and in Education" for the *Fortnightly* (1874) were the touchstones for those who advocated different educational programmes for men and women based on their "innate" and "natural" physical and mental differences. Without wanting to suggest that any of Mill's critics had the work of Clarke and Maudsley in mind, I nevertheless want to signal the context in which Mill's "ill-formed" sexuality and theoretical authority was understood. Mill's experience, as it was reworked and reimagined in the Victorian press, could be understood as a cautionary tale and as an argument for the social

control that a national, compulsory system of education would provide, one which could manage and account for sexual/intellectual differences between men and women in order to produce a coherent, "progressive" social body. John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* served as the record of an unnatural genius who had been the unwitting victim of a cruel, private, and unsupervised education. Its publication, together with the "facts" of Mill's life as he represented them, served as an occasion for Victorian reviewers to stake their own claims within various contexts of social and political investigation and upheaval, one of which was the transformation of national education.

Without the notion of two contrary, defining sexualities, the criticisms of both Mill's *Autobiography* and his general ability to speak to the Victorian middle-class reader, may have looked much different, because they would not have appealed to newly-consecrated discourses and knowledges of sexual difference between men and women. Mill's *Autobiography* generates anxieties about that difference--by producing a representation of an identity which, never fully formulated, is caught somewhere in between gendered, intellectual influences. While Mill presented his progress as a "logical", albeit vexed process of development which was not really that extraordinary or different from the average, readers and reviewers reacted to Mill's self-representation with a certain amount of alarm and a patronizing kind of pity, the latter of which I read in the context of the general acknowledgement of the failure of Benthamism by the 1870s.

Because Mill had not received the proper exposure to "the feminine" in his early life, it was argued, because he had grown up in the cloistered and vitiated air of

the Utilitarian circle, Mill could never hope to appeal to a broad audience, and yet it was precisely his embrace of "the feminine"--his sentimental socialism, his identification with Harriet Taylor and Victorian feminism, which spelled his "impotency" as a theorist.

Notes

1.See Mary Poovey's *Making a Social Body*.

2.By the 1870s, when Mill's *Autobiography* was published and reviewed, Victorian audiences were becoming more accustomed to reading and hearing the feminine public voice. An organized Victorian feminist movement had its beginnings around 1850 and was largely centred around middle-class women's education and employment issues, law reform, and women's suffrage but the general perception that the feminine public voice was "unwomanly" persisted alongside feminist activism. See Levine and Hollis.

3.All of James Mill's nine children were educated in a similar manner by their father, although John was given the task of educating the two siblings closest in age to his own. James Mill did not seem to divide subject areas along gender lines--his five daughters learned Latin and other "masculine" knowledges along with their brothers. See Stillinger.

4.A contemporary psychoanalytic reading of Mill's self-representation adds to the notion that Mill's identity is contradictory: "He was brilliantly intelligent, and yet almost naively innocent. He was exaggeratively rational, and yet deeply sensual. He was an oppressed and a manipulated child, but he became a most liberated and a most liberal man. His socialization was thoroughly abnormal, but he became a profoundly civilized person. We scarcely can help but conclude that Mill's life well might had made the matter of some mad and marvelous fiction . . . " (Glassman 2). What I wish to signal here is the persistence of the idea that Mill's subjectivity was deeply and irrevocably divided and contradicted, mostly as a result of his father's control over his education. In addition, Glassman's comparison of Mill's life to a "mad fiction" shares something with the early reviews of the *Autobiography*--the reviewer for *Fraser's* compares the relationship between Mill and his father to that of Frankenstein and his monster.

5. See Hurt and Levine.

6.Mill's position rests at an interesting crossroads between opposed arguments, for while Mill and Taylor strongly believed in the principle of a sound education for all,

much of Mill's writing, thought, and even his daily preference for a small closed circle of acquaintance, reveal a profound antipathy towards "the tyranny of the majority" (an expression used often in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which Mill counted as one of his influences) and public opinion--*On Liberty* provides the best example of this fear within Mill's thought. Drawing from Mary Poovey's descriptions of the unevenness of ideological and practical developments in the Victorian formation of a social body, I read this contradiction in Mill as an example of the coexistence of residual attitudes towards the psychology of groups with new attitudes about the value of individuality and difference. Here one can see a persistence of the idea that public opinion, the crowd, the masses etc. is tyrannical in its homogeneity, at the same time that forms of universality in particular institutional structures are touted as the mark and guarantee of a just and civilized society.

7.He refers to his wife, Harriet Taylor, whom he met in 1830 when she was married to John Taylor, a pharmaceutical merchant. After John Taylor died, Mill and Taylor married in 1851, the culmination of a twenty-year friendship. I will discuss the political function of the representation of their "scandalous" friendship and marriage below, but at this point, I want to point out the way in which Mill "hides" Taylor in his text by referring to her without naming her. Mill's Victorian readers would have been familiar with the identity of "the one to whom most of all is due", yet Mill chooses to obscure her identity at the outset of the *Autobiography*, as if to create an element of suspense in his text. The *Edinburgh Review* followed suit in the way it introduced Taylor: "Let us trace . . . the state of mind into which he finally relapsed, under another powerful influence"; "Who then was this extraordinary being? That we shall presently discover, but as yet we are speaking of mortals" (Reeve 95 and 116); "He had his divinity, but his divinity was a woman" states the reviewer for the *Contemporary Review* (63). These references to Taylor are marked by an ominous tone, creating an air of mystery, mockery, and shame surrounding her influence on Mill's life. The refusal to name Harriet Taylor in most of the reviews perpetuates the notion of their relationship as unspeakable and aberrant.

8.Ira Nadel suggests that the continuing popularity of biography in the twentieth century is a result of the "conservatism" of the genre. He argues that biography has replaced realist fiction as a best-selling genre because, unlike modern, experimental fiction, the structure, language, and form of biography confirms a linear, coherent model of subjective experience with which readers identify. "Narrative sequence is configured before the actual text is begun because of the known history of the subject's life" ("Narrative" 132). Therefore, a reader's expectations are rarely challenged at the level of structure, although the biography may present "sensational" facts about the subject.

9.F.A. Hayek's work on Mill's and Taylor's relationship provides excerpts from their correspondence before and during their marriage and remains an important study of

Mill's and Taylor's shared history. In 1854 Mill wrote to Taylor, "I too have thought very often lately about the life & am most anxious that we should complete it the soonest possible. What there is of it is in a perfectly publishable state. As far as the writing goes it could be printed tomorrow--& it contains a full writing out as far as anything can write out, what you are, as far as I am competent to describe you, & what I owe to you--but, besides that until revised by you it is little better than unwritten, it contains nothing about our private circumstances, further than shewing that there was an intimate friendship for many years . . . " (190).

10.The review's disdain of Mill is understandable in light of the opposing political persuasion it served. "An organ of Tory opinion", *The Quarterly Review* survived from 1824 to 1900 and was founded as an answer to the Whig-minded *Edinburgh Review*. Throughout its existence, it was identified as a repository of conservative opinion on social questions, if not always on party issues. By the 1870s, "as causes and crises succeeded each other with ever-increasing speed and complexity", the *Quarterly* remained allegiant to broad conservatism, as evidenced by its adherence to tradition. See Houghton, Volume 1.

11.Modeled on *Blackwood's*, *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 1830-1882, focused on politics, religion, and social conditions with an emphasis on literary style. According to the introduction in the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, *Fraser's* occupied a middle ground between open rebellion and conservative thought in its early days--it took a progressive stance on socio-economic issues but was conservative in its politics. Known for its variety of style and content, some of the most well-known contributors to *Fraser's* included George Henry Lewes, Frances Power Cobbe, James Anthony Froude, and less frequently, Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, and Mill himself. See Houghton, Volume 2. By the 1870s, under Froude's editorship, *Fraser's* had become "free-thinking" in its stance on religious and social issues, but remained politically conservative.

12.This quotation is found in *The Fortnightly Review* (1865-1900), of which the writer, John Morley, was editor. George Henry Lewes was the first editor of the review, which saw as its mandate a radical political and religious neutrality, the promotion of liberty and progress, and the freedom from restrictions of party and editorial policy. Houghton writes that the *Fortnightly* did not always practice the liberal theories it espoused, and that a tension between a desire for an open platform of ideas and an adherence to tradition marked the history of the publication. The *Fortnightly* was the first major review in Victorian Britain to abandon anonymity and pseudonymity. See Houghton, Volume 2.

13.*The Westminster Review* (1824-1900) was founded and funded by Jeremy Bentham and was influenced in its early days by James Mill. The *Westminster* was to be the Radical answer to the Whig *Edinburgh Review* and the Tory *Quarterly Review*. The

history of the *Westminster* is complex. It operated under severe financial duress in its early years, undergoing several name changes and a merger with the radical *London Review* in the 1830s. Under the editorship of John Stuart Mill between 1836 and 1840, the *London and Westminster Review* shifted its strict focus on a Benthamite philosophy to one which included the views of cultural radicals influenced by S.T. Coleridge and German Romantic philosophy. The failure of the radical party to make a significant impact on the British parliament throughout the 1830s after the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832 meant that Mill was indisposed to continue editing the review and he eventually sold it in 1840. Under the editorship and ownership of successive proprietors of the *Westminster Review* ("London" was dropped out of the title in 1840), the review remained an active and influential supporter of social reform in education, labour conditions, women's issues, law, medical practice, and public sanitation. Notable contributors to the *Westminster* throughout the century included W.M. Thackeray, Leigh Hunt, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau, Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, and W.R. Greg. See Houghton, Volume 3.

14.Regenia Gagnier echoes this observation when she writes that Mill's conception of individuality does not depend upon a notion of the citizen as a privatized and retreating self who jealously guards his own property and interests. Of Mill's withdrawal from society, then, Gagnier observes that Mill "retired to a life of politics" (252). Ironically, his engagements with "the world" were conducted from the privacy of his home, complicating the boundary between what constitutes public and private activity in the Victorian ideology of separate spheres.

15. See Chapter 2, Note 10.

Afterword

The impetus for this project was the pleasure and the lure of the Brontë mythology itself. After reading Elizabeth Gaskell's biography for the first time, I was particularly struck by the ways in which Gaskell was able to create a version of her subject which both confirmed and disputed the rumours surrounding Brontë that had already taken hold of the public imagination long before Gaskell set out to write the Life. For me, the fascination with Charlotte Brontë as an individual writer eventually opened on to a desire to uncover the public meaning her life and work had held for reading audiences, in order to better understand the way specific writers are positioned and made use of in the field of literary production at specific historical moments. This necessitated attention towards not only the way in which Gaskell and Mill produced their texts and the subjectivities represented therein, but also towards the particular significance placed upon these texts at the time of their publication--what the texts themselves produced. I found that reviews in the Victorian periodical press provided clues as to how and why certain values are given to writers at different times, but I might also have looked at obituaries, letters or diaries. The value of documents drawn from the periodical press, however, is that they are written not for a single and specified reader, but for an aggregate audience (or an idea of one) of multiple readers whose disparate interests and convictions are levelled in the interest of forming the appearance of a commonality and homogeneity of opinion.

In the opening stages of thinking about this project, I often read Brontë, Gaskell

and Mill as though they were singular figures whose work and whose reputation was unmediated by cultural and social forces (such as public opinion) which structured the literary institutions through which their work was produced and regulated. Such a reading practice is, in part, engendered by the form and structure of the genre of life-writing itself, which presupposes and is made intelligible by a perceived breach between the "special case" and an oppressive, or indifferent, or misguided, but always "mass" reading audience who reads *for* the difference between itself and the subject. Through thinking about this generic assumption in life-writing, I began to focus less on the difference of individuals as such, and more on how difference and sameness themselves are constituted by the discourses, genres, and practices to which multiple readers have varying forms of access. In developing my chapter on John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, for example, I shifted from conceiving of the representation of his identity as isolated, acausal, and fractured, to thinking of it as a historically- and institutionally-situated construct with a specific and coherent logic which was evidently recognized and expected by a Victorian readership.

I found that by thinking and writing about the shared political and social meaning of Gaskell's and Mill's work, I was able to conceive of my project not as an esoteric and essentially private body of research and writing about individuals, but as a public document which draws from and contributes to other explanations of the history and development of communities of readers within a capitalist regime. As Regenia Gagnier writes, "[T]he study of autobiography is not merely a genteel (or a gentile or genital) literary exercise but a gauge of citizens' degrees of social participation and

exclusion, consensus and revolt" (278). Life-writing and the investigation of its relationship to reading audiences can provide us with a more complete and nuanced understanding of the ways in which elaborations of individual subjectivity (re)produce images of development and progress for what is referred to as the social body.

> It is not progress that we object to; on the contrary, we flatter ourselves that we are the most progressive people who ever lived. It is individuality that we war against: we should think we had done wonders if we had made ourselves all alike, forgetting that the unlikeness of one person to another is generally the first thing which draws the attention of either to the imperfection of his own type and the superiority of another, or the possibility, by combining the advantages of both, of producing something better than either (Mill 137).

John Stuart Mill's 1859 *On Liberty* provides me with an example in liberal thought of one definition of sameness and difference and their relationship to innovation. For Mill, the "sameness" public opinion enforced was detrimental to the development of a "free" society of autonomous individuals. For others, sameness was a sign of progress because it meant that social problems could be predicted and solved with greater efficiency. Progress for Mill depended on the freedom of individual expression, but this was to be combined with a general willingness to learn through each other's difference, not through conformity to tradition or a retreat to the private. In any case, public opinion was one of the forces which structured and regulated the inside and the outside of the social body in Victorian culture. Notions of acceptable social and individual behaviour and thought in the general formation of mass culture in nineteenth-century history come to us through elaborations of "the opinion" of "the public"--as in Victorian periodical reviews--and through theorizations of public opinion

such as Mill's, and through imaginative and historical texts such as biographies and autobiographies which narrate what appear to be individual identities within a larger framework.

To conclude, I want to outline another of my primary motivations for researching and writing this thesis. It involved a need to understand whether or not my preconceived notions about Victorian literature and culture were "accurate" or "stereotypical". Throughout the preceding chapters, I have made countless references to "Victorian reading audiences", and "the Victorian imagination", the assumption being that "Victorian" signifies a stable, knowable period, attitude, set of beliefs, etc. While I recognize the indeterminacy of historical terms like "Victorian", which often lead to reductive descriptions of complex social organizations, I also think that it is important to retain such terms in literary and historical criticism. Without these kinds of descriptors, knowledge of hegemonies becomes less possible to grasp because language can no longer provide us with a common frame through which to make sense of the past. Without a secure, if provisional knowledge of the ways in which the social is constructed in history out of related practices, discourses, beliefs, and expectations, possibilities for resistance and transformation of dominant and oppressive ideologies are forgotten.[1] My hope is that one of the implications of this project is that historical signposts like the word and the concept "Victorian" or even "subjectivity" are always subject to re-evaluation and redefinition, as the specific needs for historical research

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[1]The work of Tony Bennett and Teresa Ebert has helped me to understand this.

change and as our knowledge of the complexity of historical periods grows.

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